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ABSTRACT

This monograph reports the findings of a study based on interviews with 50 young mothers who participated in a national research and demonstration program called New Chance. It explains that New Chance aims to increase the employment, economic self-sufficiency, and general well-being of young women on Aid to Families with Dependent Children who are high school dropouts, and to enhance the learning and development of their children as well. Chapter 1 supplies a context for understanding the report and its findings. After a statistical overview of sample members' activities after receiving their high school equivalency certificate, Chapter 2 explores the meaning of progress for this group of young women. Chapters 3 through 5 cover the experiences of these young women in the workplace, at school, and in their personal lives. Chapter 6 considers the women's backgrounds before they joined New Chance, then examines their experiences in the program, and, finally, considers their activities after leaving New Chance. Chapter 7 takes note of the significant degree of variation within the sample and its implications for program design. Chapter 8 reviews the study's key findings and then suggests lessons and possible directions for research, programs, and policies that arise from these findings. (NB)

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Lives of Promise, Lives of Pain

Young Mothers After New Chance

Janet C. Quint
Judith S. Musick
with Joyce A. Ladner

ED 367 929

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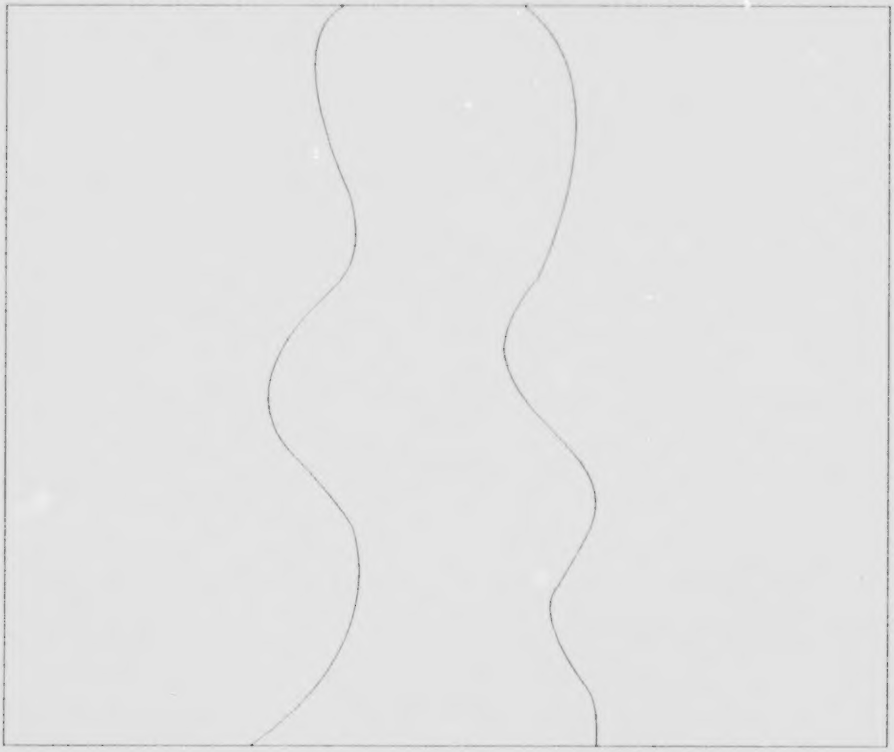

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Preface

This monograph speaks to a number of interrelated issues that are prominent on the domestic policy agenda: reducing out-of-wedlock births to teen mothers, designing programs that successfully prepare young school dropouts for work, reducing welfare and encouraging work, changing schools and community colleges so that they will be more successful with disadvantaged students, and assisting the children of especially disadvantaged young mothers.

It is being published at a time of heightened interest in welfare reform, a time when the public is angry and eager for simple solutions. At such a time, it is easy to think in abstractions and to forget the complexity of young lives lived in poverty.

This study brings us the voices of young mothers who were on welfare and who enrolled in New Chance, a comprehensive program of education, employment-related services, life skills instruction, parenting education, and child care. As is true of the other activities in the New Chance Demonstration, this monograph would not have been possible without the generous support of the funders listed at the front of this document. The study was not undertaken to inform the debate on welfare reform per se, but to help explain why New Chance would or would not succeed in moving the young mothers and their children toward the program's goal of self-sufficiency. It sought to get behind average numbers and portray the complexity of the people in the program.

We hear the young women talk about why they dislike welfare and want to be self-sufficient but, in most cases, stay on the rolls; why they want to work, yet often leave their jobs; and why they entered New Chance, but often attended irregularly or dropped out. We learn about their aspirations for, and disappointments in, community college; about their feelings for their children, and why they frequently have more; about the importance of the young mothers' own mothers and the ways in which poverty and poor parenting intersect to shape the young mothers' lives and to make them overreliant on often unreliable men. We view the environments in which children on welfare are growing up and begin to understand why, despite their many efforts, the young mothers often fail. Finally, we see a diverse group of young women—some very disadvantaged, and others less so; some who will probably spend many years on welfare, and others who are making strides toward self-support.

The young women portrayed in this monograph inspire us with their attempts to succeed, but dismay us with their frequent failures. We are reminded of the poverty of their lives, their lack of support and resources, their youth, and the human dramas likely to accompany any effort to change our welfare system radically.

Listening to them, simple solutions do not seem so simple.

Judith M. Gueron
President

Acknowledgments

Our greatest debt is to the young women who participated in the interviews on which this study is based. They welcomed us into their homes and responded to our questions thoughtfully, candidly, and with good humor. We hope we have presented their ideas and feelings, strengths and weaknesses, dreams and struggles in a way that is faithful to their perceived experience. We also hope that this study illuminates some of the obstacles in the young women's paths as they try to make a good life for themselves and their children and suggests ways in which public policy and programs can help clear away these barriers.

The program coordinators and case managers at the five New Chance sites from which respondents were drawn were helpful to us in innumerable ways. They spent time talking to us about the young women's in-program experiences, gave us access to their case files, provided us with updated address information on the study subjects, and in several cases got in touch with potential interviewees to determine their interest in participating. To preserve the study subjects' confidentiality, we have opted not to identify individual staff members, but we want them to know how thankful we are for their assistance.

At MDRC, Bob Granger played a major role in the development and completion of the study. He brought the authors together, and we are grateful for his wise guidance, encouragement, and attention. Judith Gueron, Judith Greissman, Rob Ivry, Suzanne Lynn, and Marilyn Price offered helpful comments on earlier drafts of the manuscript.

The manuscript also benefited from close readings and thoughtful suggestions from Gilbert Steiner, Frank F. Furstenberg, Jr., Lorraine Klerman, and Denise Polit, and from the editorial skills of Phoebe Hoss. Conversations with Pam Stevens and Ruby Morton Gourdine helped us sharpen and clarify our thinking.

At the Temple University Institute for Survey Research, which is conducting the New Chance survey effort, Peter Buffum supplied survey data helpful for understanding the young women's lives and contact information that assisted us in locating some possible interviewees.

Finally, we appreciate the contributions of many people to the production of both the interview transcripts and the study itself. Shirley Pett ensured a smooth flow of faxes and other materials to New York (Janet Quint) from Chicago (Judith Musick), as did Barbara Wiggins from Washington, D.C. (Joyce Ladner). At MDRC, Fran Derocher supervised a cadre of interview transcribers. Maggie Sarachek reviewed several of the transcripts against the recorded interviews and offered perceptive comments about the interview subjects. Patt Pontevolpe and Stephanie Cowell produced the final text and tables, and Michael Wilde carefully checked the completed document.

The Authors

Part I

Chapter 1

Introduction

This monograph reports the findings of a study based on interviews with 50 young mothers who participated in a national research and demonstration program called New Chance. New Chance aims to increase the employment, economic self-sufficiency, and general well-being of young women on AFDC who are high school dropouts, and to enhance the learning and development of their children as well. These young families constitute a segment of the welfare population that is at especially high risk of long-term poverty and receipt of public assistance. During the program's demonstration phase, which began in 1989 and concluded in 1992, New Chance was operated by community-based organizations, schools, a community college, and municipal agencies at 16 locations (or "sites") in 10 states across the country, and enrolled over 1,550 young women.

New Chance offers a much wider spectrum of services and a more supportive environment than the majority of adult education, training, or other welfare-to-work programs for AFDC recipients; and unlike such programs, it focuses on participants' roles as mothers as well as potential workers. The employment thrust of the intervention and the comprehensiveness, intensity, and duration of its services also differentiate New Chance from many previous programs for young mothers and high school dropouts.

The effectiveness of the New Chance treatment is being assessed through a large random assignment evaluation of the program's impacts, costs, and benefits. This monograph is a complementary effort, relying on close examination of a small group of participants to provide insight into their behavior. The findings of this small, primarily qualitative study will be used to help interpret the results of the impact analysis when these become available. The monograph addresses three principal questions:

1. What personal characteristics and what factors in their backgrounds and current situations promote the participation of disadvantaged young mothers in social programs, or, conversely, constrain that participation, preventing them from attaining even relatively short-term program goals?

2. Why, once they have earned a high school equivalency (General Educational Development, or GED) certificate, are young adults often stymied in their efforts to advance further toward self-sufficiency?

3. What changes in program practice and in public policy are likely to foster the self-sufficiency and development of young families in poverty?

To address these questions, interviews were conducted with two groups of young women who together make up the study sample. One group comprises 34 young women who succeeded in attaining the program's principal short-term objective—a

GED certificate—by the time they left New Chance; their post-GED experiences are chronicled in Part II. The second group includes 16 young mothers who had not earned this credential by the time they left the program; this group is discussed in Part III.

Although, as discussed below, the study sample is not fully representative of the entire New Chance population, all program enrollees fit one of these two categories—GED completers or non-completers. According to data collected by the program staff, just under a quarter (24 percent) of all program entrants had received their GED certificates by February 1992[1]; on the basis of this information, study sample members were divided into the two groups.

While GED completers and noncompleters differ in a number of ways, as will be discussed, there is also extraordinary diversity *within* each group. At the time of the interview, an average of 30 months after leaving New Chance, some members of each group were forging ahead; some had moved forward but then lost their footing and seemed "stuck"; and some had made very little progress.

But in general, the course of the women involved in this study was, like a roller-coaster ride, marked by reverses, plunges, and upturns. Most of the 50 young mothers whose lives are examined here were still receiving public assistance when interviewed. Collectively and individually, the young women encountered a number of barriers to success—personal, interpersonal, and institutional; transitory and more enduring.

This monograph, covering a wide array of topics whose relevance transcends the New Chance program, is aimed at a variety of policymakers and administrators. Welfare policymakers may be especially interested in the implications of these young women's post-New Chance experiences for some of the welfare reform proposals now under discussion, especially those that would impose strict time limits on welfare receipt or make welfare contingent on particular behaviors, as well as in these young women's views of the complex economic and psychological trade-offs between work and welfare and of the salient roles their own mothers (sometimes on welfare themselves) play in the provision of child care to their grandchildren. Adult educators and youth employment program personnel who are concerned about (although not necessarily surprised by) the frequently disappointing records of young mothers in college and the labor force may be interested in the strategies suggested for better preparing young people for these new settings. Those interested in human development in general, and in child development in particular, will find important and sometimes disturbing information on how many of these young welfare mothers were raised, and on how they, in turn, are raising their children. And family planning educators will be reminded that contraceptive ignorance remains all too prevalent.

The aim of this chapter is to supply a context for understanding the report and its findings. After examining what New Chance provides to its participants and what it is trying to achieve, the chapter describes the program's goals and service structure, as well as the policy environment in which the New Chance Demonstration has unfolded. Then, the larger New Chance research agenda, the place of this study within that agenda, and the study's methodology are explained. The last two sections examine the baseline demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of study respondents.

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[1] Although February 1992 was the most recent month for which computerized data were available at the time the study was designed, these data do not cover any young women who may have earned the GED after leaving New Chance without notifying program staff of the fact.

The New Chance Model and Its Policy Context

The New Chance model and demonstration were developed by the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation, a private nonprofit organization that designs and tests initiatives intended to improve the well-being and self-sufficiency of poor people. As shown in Table 1.1, New Chance is targeted principally at young mothers aged 16 to 22 who were teenagers when they first gave birth, who lack a high school diploma or its equivalent, and who are receiving public assistance.[2] The program aims to build "human capital"—i.e., to improve participants' academic and vocational skills—so that they can enter the labor force and become self-sufficient. It also has several other goals: to help participants delay further childbearing, to strengthen their decision-making and communication skills, and gain parenting skills that will make them better able to enhance the development of their children; and to improve children's developmental outcomes directly through high-quality child care and pediatric health care.

To achieve these diverse goals, the New Chance model prescribes educational, employment-related, life skills, health, and parenting services, along with free child care while mothers are enrolled in the program; all young women are expected to receive the full complement of services. Case management is also an important program feature; case managers keep track of each participant's progress and provide continuous guidance and support. Some case managers have mental health backgrounds, and some sites have established relationships with agencies to which participants who need more intensive psychological counseling can be referred. Local programs are small (each site was expected to enroll 100 participants over 12 to 18 months) to help ensure an intimate and personal environment in which participants and staff can establish close bonds. The staff strive to create an atmosphere that is supportive but also demanding, with daily attendance at all classes expected.

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[2] Because participants were expected to be able to take full advantage of program services and make the transition into employment, pregnant applicants were excluded from the program and told to reapply after delivery. However, enrollees were not required to submit proof that they were not pregnant, and some who were (but may not have known it yet) were admitted to the sample.

To enable programs to serve very needy young women who had completed high school and/or were not receiving AFDC, sites were permitted to enroll 25 percent of the applicants under an eligibility "window," admitting high school graduates with reading scores below the ninth-grade level and/or young women who were economically disadvantaged but not on welfare. Despite the existence of this "window," 96 percent of enrollees were receiving AFDC upon program entry, and 93 percent had neither a high school diploma nor a high school equivalency (GED) certificate.

MDRC considered including young fathers in the program but ultimately decided that this would not be feasible from the standpoint of cost. Planners also questioned whether the problems and the needs of young fathers would be adequately addressed in a program directed primarily toward, and staffed mostly by, women. One site has elected to serve young fathers as well as young mothers in its program.

TABLE 1.1

THE NEW CHANCE MODEL

Target Group

Mothers age 16 to 22 who: (1) first gave birth at age 19 or younger; (2) receive welfare; (3) do not have a high school diploma or GED; and (4) are not pregnant when they enter the program.

Treatment

5 Categories of Service Components:

Education: adult basic education, GED preparation

Employment-related services: employability development (career exploration and pre-employment skills training), work internships, occupational skills training, job placement assistance

Health and personal development: Life Skills and Opportunities curriculum, health education and health services, family planning, adult survival skills training

Services to enhance the development of participants' children: parenting education, child care, pediatric health services

Case management

Service Emphasis: integration and reinforcement in each component of all program messages and skills

Service Structure: sequential phases of program activities, long duration, high intensity, on-site service delivery

Environment: small, personal programs; warm and supportive—but demanding—atmosphere

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During a participant's first several months in the program, most services are delivered at the program site, and basic education and GED preparation classes typically take up two to three hours of a participant's six-hour day. The remaining time is spent attending classes and workshops on such topics as possible careers, nutrition, family planning, and child development. GED preparation and these other on-site activities constitute "Phase 1" of the program.

As envisioned in the program model, receipt of a GED is the first step to self-sufficiency. After participants have received this credential, they enter "Phase 2" and are expected to increase their human capital further by enrolling in college or vocational training or by entering paid or unpaid short-term work experience positions (called "work internships" in program parlance)—activities that commonly take place away from the program site. The ultimate goal is for participants to enter and keep jobs offering fringe benefits and opportunities for advancement.

Program guidelines specify that young women may remain in New Chance for 18 months, with up to a year of additional follow-up by case managers. In other words, case managers are expected to remain in contact with enrollees who have received their GEDs and moved on to training, college, or jobs.[3]

New Chance was designed in response to an issue that has increasingly concerned policymakers and program planners at national, state, and local levels: the dramatic rise in childbearing among unmarried teens over the last two decades and its adverse consequences for long-term poverty and receipt of public assistance, as well as for the development of the children born to teenage mothers.[4] Although young women aged 19 and under account for only about 8 percent of mothers receiving AFDC at any given time, they remain on welfare for so long that families begun by teenage mothers account for the majority of all welfare expenditures; it is estimated that 51 percent of the women who received AFDC payments in 1990 were 19 or younger at the birth of their first child (Moore, 1993).

Planning for New Chance antedated the Family Support Act of 1988, legislation that reflected congressional concern about the fiscal, personal, and social costs of extended stays on public assistance. The Job Opportunities and Basic Skills Training (JOBS) Program, created as part of that act, offers state welfare agencies funding and other incentives to provide education, vocational skills training, job placement, and other employment-related services, either directly or through contracts with other agencies. Essentially, all household heads on welfare whose youngest child is three years of age or older (one or older at state option), and who do not have other responsibilities keeping them at home, may be required to participate in JOBS; failure to do so without good cause may result in a reduction in one's welfare grant, known as a "sanction." Through the financial incentives embedded in the legislation, JOBS encourages states to serve people whose educational deficits and poor employment histories make them candidates for long-term welfare. Other JOBS provisions seek to ease the transition from welfare to work by allowing former recipients who leave welfare because of increased earnings to retain Medicaid eligibility for one year; states must also provide transitional child care, with fees established on a sliding-scale basis, for up to 12 months.

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[3] The extent to which this has occurred has varied from one program locale to another, however. As caseloads have grown, case managers have inevitably devoted most of their attention to young women who are in on-site activities. A review of the respondents' case files indicates that case notes documenting contacts with the young women were much more frequent during the pre-GED period than subsequently.

This may be because many enrollees seem to think of New Chance as an enriched GED program. That is, once a young woman receives her GED, she may remain in contact with her New Chance case manager but no longer think of herself as a New Chance participant; instead, she is a student at a particular college or training program or an employee at a particular workplace, and thus less apt to initiate contact with her case manager to discuss new situations and problems.

[4] For a review of the incidence and consequences of teenage childbearing, see National Research Council, 1987.

JOBS also aims to keep young mothers in school. Mothers under the age of 20, with children of any age, who lack a high school diploma or its equivalent may be required to participate in educational activities as a condition of getting aid. Three states—Maryland, Ohio, and Wisconsin—now operate statewide initiatives whose dual objectives are to reduce dropout rates among young parents already attending school and to induce those who have already dropped out to return to the classroom; other states are now planning similar interventions or operate them on a smaller scale.[5]

New Chance, a program option under JOBS, is both more narrowly focused—being targeted at high school dropouts, who as a group are at especially high risk of being on welfare a long time[6]—and more comprehensive in its orientation than other JOBS-funded education or employment programs. The demonstration tests the effects of offering these young mothers services that are both wide-ranging and intensive, on the premise that the relatively high cost of such programs will be justified if they succeed in reducing lengthy stays on the welfare rolls and in improving outcomes for participants' children. Most New Chance sites have used JOBS monies to support the costs of occupational skills training, support services (e.g., child care or transportation), or program staff.

Statistics collected when young women enrolled in the program reflect both the heterogeneity of the population and the sizable barriers to self-sufficiency that many participants face. For example, while one fifth of the enrollees read at the tenth-grade level or higher, one third read at the sixth-grade level or lower. While 37 percent of the enrollees reported that their families had never received AFDC when they were growing up, 17 percent came from families that had been on public assistance throughout their childhoods. According to a widely used measure, half of the young women were at risk, and a quarter were at high risk, of clinical depression.

Often participants' problems became known to program staff only over time, as case managers and others gained the young women's confidence and learned more about their lives. A survey administered to site staff to learn about the extent of these problems found that between one tenth and one sixth of the enrollees with whose situations staff were familiar were the victims of past or present physical or sexual abuse, or used alcohol or illicit drugs (or had family members or partners who did so) to such an extent that it interfered with their program attendance, or were discouraged from participating by boyfriends or family members. Strikingly, almost half of the young women with whose situations program staff were familiar did not have a stable place to live at some point during their program tenure.

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[5] MDRC is now evaluating the effects of one such model, Ohio's Learning, Earning, and Parenting (LEAP) Program. LEAP is unique in offering both financial rewards and penalties as incentives for teenage mothers on welfare to attend school regularly (see Bloom et al., 1993; Pawasarat, Quinn, and Stetzer, 1992).

[6] A pathbreaking analysis of data from the Panel Study of Income Dynamics indicates that nonwhite women who went on welfare after giving birth as unmarried mothers, and who were high school dropouts, averaged 10 years on the welfare rolls (Bane and Ellwood, 1983).

In fact, almost two thirds of the New Chance enrollees met the federal criteria for required enrollment in JOBS when they first entered New Chance: most because they were under 20 years old and lacked a high school diploma; and the remainder because they were 20 to 22 and their youngest child was at least three years old.

Because New Chance operated primarily as a voluntary program, enrollees do not comprise a representative cross-section of all young welfare mothers without a high school diploma. Since it was not feasible to collect data on young women who were eligible for New Chance but chose not to enroll, differences between program enrollees and non-enrollees remain a matter of speculation. Young women who joined New Chance may have been more motivated and (at least at the outset) faced fewer obstacles to participation than other young mothers who met the eligibility criteria but opted not to enroll. On the other hand, it is also possible that some young women who had heard about New Chance and met its eligibility criteria chose not to enroll because they felt they were doing well without the program's assistance, or because there were features of the program model that did not appeal to them.

The New Chance Research Agenda and the Origins of This Study

This monograph fits into, and grows out of, a substantial agenda of research on the implementation and effectiveness of the New Chance model and on the program's costs and benefits. For the impact and benefit-cost analyses, some 2,300 young women across the 16 sites who met the program's eligibility criteria were randomly assigned either to the program treatment or to a control group, whose members were excluded from New Chance but could receive other services available in the community. Structured interviews with members of both the treatment and the control groups, conducted at 18 and 42 months after entry into the research sample, provide the data needed to determine the program's effects on enrollees' educational attainment, employment and welfare receipt, parenting behavior, fertility, psychological well-being, and other outcomes of interest. At 42 months, the developmental progress of sample members' children will be measured as well. Preliminary impact findings (along with final implementation results) will be available in 1994, and a final report on the program's impacts, benefits, and costs is scheduled for 1996.

The implementation analysis examines the challenges associated with mounting and operating the New Chance model: putting the components in place, recruiting enrollees, and securing their participation. Participation is a central issue in all service programs if they are to achieve their goals: that is, program clients must, presumably, receive an adequate "dose" of the services offered for their impact to be measurable (although just what is adequate is an empirical question).

Interest in using open-ended interviews to probe participants' life circumstances, activities, and perspectives was aroused by some troubling findings and issues raised by a 1991 implementation report (Quint, Fink, and Rowser) detailing the early period of program operations, and by additional analyses that followed the report. In many respects, the report offered encouraging news: it concluded that the New Chance model was generally feasible to operate and could be put in place by several different kinds of organizations. However, early participation data indicated that absenteeism was a common problem at a number of New Chance sites, as in many other programs serving disadvantaged populations (see Auspos et al., 1989; U.S. Department of Education, 1988; Higgins, 1988). Site staff gave many explanations for absenteeism: illness of participants and of their children; transportation problems; conflicting welfare and medical appointments; enrollees' lack of interest, unfamiliarity with a daily routine, and personal problems. But these reasons reflected staff members' perceptions and beliefs, and what the young women told them. It was not possible to determine whether New Chance was meeting participants' own felt needs. This issue was especially critical for those young women who did not succeed in getting a GED fairly early in their program tenure and were likely to leave the program after only a few months.

There was also anecdotal evidence from several sites that young women who had completed their GEDs were not continuing in Phase 2 activities. Program staff reported in frustration that these young women had joined New Chance only to get this credential and, having earned it, were uninterested in taking further steps toward employment. A review of the status of program enrollees conducted at all sites suggested that, except at a couple of locations, only a few young women fit this "terminal GED" category; that there was considerable variation by site in the paths GED holders subsequently followed; that relatively few people took a job immediately after receiving the certificate; and that many young women who began college or a job training program dropped out.

These findings made it clear that many aspects of participants' behavior needed fuller explanation, which could not be provided by other quantitative sources of information. The numbers cannot provide a sense of each young woman's personal drama or its complexity. They abstract actions from their personal and interpersonal context, thereby obscuring the fact that the same behavior can reflect very different circumstances. Statistics do not explain the ways in which key decisions—to remain in or drop out of school, or take or quit a job, to continue or terminate a pregnancy—are embedded in an intricate mixture of interactive forces. Some of these forces are internal: the way the young mothers' minds and spirits have been shaped by past experiences; their inner strengths and liabilities and their sense of self; and their subjective reactions to school and the workplace. Other forces are external: the degree of support they receive from family, friends, and helping professionals; the presence of positive and negative role models; and the extent to which the institutions with which they are engaged are responsive or inimical to their needs.

It appeared that a study grounded in a methodology that allowed young women to explain themselves in their own way and in their own words would complement the data already being collected and contribute to an understanding of participants' behavior and their prospects for and progress toward self-sufficiency. Implicit in the decision to conduct the study was the notion that a grasp of participants' subjective experiences—how they construed and interpreted key events in their lives, how they viewed their own actions and those of others—would infuse with greater richness and meaning the quantitative data collected for the impact analysis, as well as the participation data.[7]

The monograph results from the collaboration of three researchers. Janet Quint, senior research associate at the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation and a sociologist, conducted the interviews and analyses of the GED completers and wrote Part II. Judith Musick, a developmental psychologist and research faculty member at the Erikson Institute for Advanced Study in Child Development of Loyola University, performed a similar role vis-à-vis the noncompleters and is the author of Part III. These two parts reflect the researchers' different disciplinary perspectives as well as the differing realities of the young women's lives: thus, Musick focuses principally on a young woman's roles in her families of both origin and procreation, while Quint is largely concerned with a young woman's interaction with institutions and settings outside the family (e.g., the workplace and college). It was not deemed necessary to impose uniformity of style or vision on these two complementary efforts. The conclusions and recommendations presented in Part IV are shared by both authors and incorporate as well the insights of Joyce Ladner, also a sociologist and currently Vice President for Academic Affairs at Howard University.

The researchers recognized that since resource constraints allowed only a small group of young women to be interviewed, the findings to emerge from the study could not be regarded as conclusive. A further limitation of the study is that respondents were asked to look back on events, some of which had happened months and even years earlier, and to recall their motives and feelings. Thus, their responses must be seen as *re-creations*, framed in the light of subsequent circumstances and understandings, rather than as accounts of immediate, spontaneous reactions. (Retrospection can also be advantageous, however, if over time respondents have gained greater insight and clarity about their behavior.)

Because GED recipients and nonrecipients appeared to face overlapping yet distinctive sets of issues, the interviews administered to members of the two groups shared a large number of questions but had somewhat different emphases. For both groups, the study examined what participants had done since joining New Chance; how they explained their past activities and viewed their present situations; and what, in retrospect, they thought about the place of the New Chance program in their lives. For a young woman who had not completed a GED, a central concern was to ascertain her reasons for leaving New Chance before achieving a GED. For the GED completers, questions centered especially on a young woman's experiences in and perceptions of college and employment, as well as on her sense of the trade-off between work and welfare receipt.

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[7] Alternatives to individual interviews, such as focus groups, were considered but rejected. For one thing, focus groups would make it more difficult to create the environment of trust necessary to secure honest responses to highly personal or sensitive questions (e.g., questions concerning unplanned pregnancies or job loss). Focus group members whose experiences were very different from those of their peers might well choose to remain silent. More important, it seemed critical to adopt an approach that would treat study subjects as fully rounded individuals whose activities in one life domain (e.g., progress toward economic independence) had to be understood in the context of their past history; their interaction with children, parents, partners, teachers, and employers; their goals and ambitions; and the factors in their environments that promoted or constrained their chances of fulfilling these goals. One-to-one interviews were the best vehicle for conveying a sense of the intricate fabric of participants' lives, while highlighting issues of particular salience to each respondent.

The Study Methodology

While interviews with former New Chance enrollees were the main source of information for the monograph, the researchers also examined baseline demographic information collected on the respondents, their New Chance case files, and the 18-month interviews conducted with them for the impact analysis. In addition, the researchers spoke with the respondents' New Chance case managers to learn what problems the young women brought to the program, how the program attempted to work with them, and how staff viewed their chances of long-term self-sufficiency.

The goal was to conduct a minimum of 30 interviews with GED attainers and 15 with non-attainers. (Different numbers of interviews were sought with respondents in the two groups because it was expected—rightly, as it turned out—that the experiences of GED completers would be more varied than those of the noncompleters.) Because an additional objective was to understand better how environment influenced the level and type of post-program activity, the interviews were conducted at several locations. Five of the 16 New Chance programs were selected as study sites. Interviews took place with both GED recipients and nonrecipients at two sites; with GED recipients only at two more sites; and with nonrecipients only at a fifth site. The sites were chosen for several reasons: they included young women from diverse ethnic and racial backgrounds; early evidence suggested that participation in Phase 2 activities differed considerably among these sites; and welfare grant levels—which were expected to influence participants' decisions to work—also differed sharply.[8]

Because the research was intended to explore and illuminate issues that emerged as salient in the interviews, rather than to arrive at statistically valid conclusions, a decision was made not to attempt to choose a random or otherwise statistically representative sample of respondents at the sites.[9] The researchers, in consultation with program staff, excluded from the sample young women whose contact with the program lasted a couple of weeks or less, on the grounds that they were unlikely to have been affected by the program in so short a time. Program staff were also asked to indicate any young women whose emotional state was so precarious that an interview might be a highly negative experience, although no one was excluded for this reason.

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[8] At two sites, the majority of New Chance enrollees were Mexican-American or of other Hispanic descent; one inner-city site reached a mostly black population; and the enrollee roster at the other two sites was almost evenly split between white and black young women.

Preliminary data indicated that participants at one site were less likely than those elsewhere to make the transition to post-GED components; while at another site, GED earners were notable for their high rate of entry into college (rather than short-term training). In the two remaining sites where the study of GED holders took place, participants were likely to move on to Phase 2 activities; but in one of these, they seemed less likely to remain engaged in post-GED training.

Finally, maximum AFDC grants in January 1993 ranged from over $575 a month for a household containing a single parent and two children in one state to under $325 a month for such a household in another, with intermediate-level grants in the remaining study sites (U.S. Congress, House Ways and Means Committee, 1993).

Since the researchers' time at the sites was limited, they could not spend it trying to locate respondents for whom contact information was out-of-date; they also tried to schedule appointments in advance. A week or two before the researchers planned to visit a site, they sent letters to all prospective respondents there explaining the study, assuring confidentiality, offering an incentive payment of $25,[10] and asking the young women to call back collect. This recruitment technique had only limited success, however.[11] To fill the remaining slots, the researchers called those young women for whom a telephone number was available; program staff also helped locate and recruit respondents, especially for the non-GED sample.

The difficulty of reaching respondents by phone reflected the lack of residential and/or financial stability of many young women. In general, the most recent information on participants' addresses and phone numbers was several months old (although staff at the study sites were extremely helpful in supplying updated information when they had it), and the researchers found that at least half the phone numbers they tried had either been reassigned or disconnected.[12] Most respondents eventually could be reached by phone, however.

The young women who were contacted directly by phone were generally cooperative.[13] Most respondents also seemed to enjoy the interview, sometimes offering the researchers food or a beverage and appearing for the most part to respond openly and honestly even to personal questions.

Except at one site, where most interviews were held at the program site for the interviewers' safety, most of the interviews were conducted in the respondents' homes, usually with their children present and sometimes with other people there as well. Thus, the interviewer could observe where and how a respondent lived and how she interacted with her children and other household members.

The interviews lasted between one and two and a half hours, depending largely on the volubility of a respondent and on the number of activities in which she had engaged during the period covered by the interview. While the researchers had developed structured questionnaires, they sought to maintain an interview style that was conversational in tone and invited open-ended responses. Interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed for further analysis.

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[9] Given the very few interviews scheduled for completion at each site, an effort at statistical precision might have produced nonrepresentative results in any event.

[10] Initially, a stipend of $15 was planned; it was raised to $25 in an effort to elicit greater interest in participation.

[11] Of the 34 GED holders in the study, 16 young women (almost all from two sites) called to schedule interviews. Among the 16 respondents without GEDs, only two were recruited in this manner.

[12] One young woman's number had been given to a fax machine. In another case, the researcher called one young woman to schedule an appointment; when she called a week later to reconfirm, she got a "this number is no longer in service" message. The interview took place only because the respondent's case manager drove out to her home to confirm the appointment.

[13] The only refusals came when a mother or other relative answered the phone, and the researchers were unable to speak directly with the young woman herself.

The Demographic Characteristics and Representativeness of the Study Respondents

Table 1.2 presents selected demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of respondents in both the GED and the non-GED groups when they first entered New Chance. On a number of dimensions, the two groups appeared similar at baseline. In both groups, the average age of the young women upon entry into New Chance was 19. About 40 percent of the respondents in both groups were black, 40 percent Hispanic (mostly Mexican-American), and the remainder white. Few of the young women had ever been married. About 45 percent of the women in both groups reported that their mothers had completed high school; the scores of the two groups of women on a measure of depression were also similar.

The very few respondents in each sample make it unlikely that even sizable differences between the groups will prove statistically significant. As expected, however, at baseline the young women in the GED group appeared more advantaged than their counterparts who did not earn this credential: the former's families of origin appeared more solid, less economically needy, and more supportive, and their educational backgrounds reflected more strengths.[14] Those in the GED group were less likely to report that they wanted another child and more likely to be using birth control; they were also more likely to have a driver's license. The young women in the non-GED group were more likely both to have been employed in the past, and also be in contact with the father of their child and to report receiving emotional support from him.

At the same time, the table confirms that there is considerable diversity within each group in terms of educational attainment, family welfare history, desired family size, and socioemotional well-being. This initial diversity helps to explain the varying amounts of progress made by members of both the GED and non-GED samples.

As noted earlier, the 50 interview respondents were not selected to be representative of all New Chance enrollees, and the researchers were aware that the procedures adopted to select respondents could introduce potential biases into the study sample. First, the sample is likely to exclude the most inadequate or troubled young mothers who enrolled in New Chance, if these young women left the

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[14] GED recipients were more likely than nonrecipients to have been living with both parents at age 14; their families were less likely to have received AFDC when they were growing up; their mothers were more likely to be employed; and they were more likely to regard their mothers as emotionally supportive. In terms of educational attainment and achievement, GED holders had completed more schooling and their reading scores were higher; they were less likely to have left school before their first pregnancy or to have repeated a grade.

TABLE 1.2

SELECTED CHARACTERISTICS OF GED ATTAINERS AND NON-ATTAINERS AMONG INTERVIEW RESPONDENTS AT INTAKE INTO THE RESEARCH SAMPLE

Characteristic	GED Attainers	Non-Attainers	Both Groups
Average age (years)	19.2	19.0	19.1[a]
Ethnicity (%)			
White, non-Hispanic	17.6	18.8	18.0[a]
Black, non-Hispanic	41.2	37.5	40.0
Hispanic	34.3	43.8	38.0
Other	5.9	0.0	4.0
Marital status (%)			
Never married	88.2	100.0	92.0[a]
Married, spouse absent	11.8	0.0	8.0
Number of children (%)			
1	55.9	68.8	60.0[a]
2	26.5	18.8	24.0
3 or more	17.7	12.5	16.0
Average number of children	1.7	1.4	1.6
Age at first child's birth (%)			
15 or under	17.6	6.3	14.0[a]
16-17	52.9	62.5	56.0
18-19	29.4	31.3	30.0
Lives with mother (%)	47.1	18.8	38.0
Lives with father (%)	17.6	0.0	12.0[a]
Lives with spouse/partner (%)	5.9	18.8	10.0[a]
Lived with both parents at age 14 (%)	41.2	12.5	32.0[*]
Highest grade completed (%)			
9th or below	26.5	43.8	32.0
10th	32.4	25.0	30.0
11th or above	41.2	31.3	38.0
Average highest grade completed	10.1	9.8	10.0

(continued)

TABLE 1.2 (continued)

Characteristic	GED Attainers	Non-Attainers	Both Groups
Left school before first pregnancy (%)	35.3	62.5	44.0
Ever repeated a grade (%)	38.2	50.0	42.0
Reading level (grade equivalent) (%)			
6th grade or below	2.9	18.8	8.0
7th or 8th grade	35.2	43.8	38.0
9th grade or above	61.8	37.7	54.0
Average reading level (grade equivalent)	9.6	8.7	9.3
Mother has high school diploma or GED (%)	44.1	43.8	44.0
Average number of jobs ever held	2.5	3.3	2.8
Employed in past 12 months (%)	38.2	43.8	40.0
Mother employed (%)	58.8	37.5	52.0[a]
Family on AFDC when respondent was young (%)[b]			
Never	48.5	31.3	42.9[a]
2 years or less	15.2	6.3	12.2
More than 2 years	21.2	43.8	28.6
Always	15.2	18.8	16.3
Expects to have more children (%)			
Yes	35.3	43.8	38.0
No	52.9	31.3	46.0
Uncertain	11.8	25.0	16.0
Used birth control at last intercourse (%)	76.5	56.3	70.0
In contact with father of child (%)[c]	52.9	75.0	60.0
Father/father's family babysits for child (%)[c]	41.2	62.5	48.0

(continued)

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TABLE 1.2 (continued)

Characteristic	GED Attainers	Non-Attainers	Both Groups
Has child support order (%)[c]	41.2	25.0	36.0
Depression score (%)[d]			
Under 16	61.8	43.8	56.0
16-23	20.6	37.5	26.0
24 or over	17.6	18.8	18.0
Receives emotional support from mother (%)	64.7	50.0	60.0
Receives emotional support from child's father (%)[c]	20.6	43.8	28.0[a]
Has home telephone (%)	100.0	81.3	94.0[a]
Has driver's license (%)	32.4	6.3	24.0*
Sample size	34	16	50

SOURCE: MDRC calculations from New Chance Management Information System data.

NOTES: The sample includes 34 young women who had enrolled in New Chance and who had attained their GEDs by March 1992 and 16 program enrollees who had not attained their GEDs by that date.

Distributions may not total 100.0 percent because of rounding.

A Pearson chi-square statistic was used to test the hypothesis of equal distributions, or an F-test was used to test the hypothesis of equal means, for the two groups. Statistical significance levels are indicated as *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

[a] A chi-square statistic was inappropriate because of low expected cell frequencies.

[b] The family's AFDC receipt may not have been continuous.

[c] When an enrollee had more than one child, her response refers to her first child.

[d] Scores on the depression scale used—the CES-D scale—can range from zero to 60. Scores of 16 and over are generally considered to indicate that the respondent is at risk for a clinical diagnosis of depression; scores of 24 and over are considered indicative of high risk for such a diagnosis.

program within a few days after joining it and their exposure to it was minimal. Second, the interview respondents may be generally more stable and more advantaged economically than other young women, since, with a few exceptions, they had not changed their residence in the preceding months and were able to pay their telephone bills regularly enough to avoid having their service disconnected.

Comparisons between the pre-program demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of study sample respondents and other New Chance enrollees help illuminate the extent of these biases. Because the characteristics of New Chance enrollees vary substantially by program location, the most appropriate comparison is between GED attainers and non-attainers who participated in the interview study at the five sites and other GED attainers and non-attainers at those sites. (For purposes of broader comparison, Appendix Table A.1 shows the characteristics of study sample members and those of all New Chance enrollees.) Again, small sample sizes reduce the likelihood that differences between the groups will be statistically significant. Nonetheless, perhaps surprising is the finding that on most of the measures, study respondents and other young women looked quite similar, and any differences do not consistently indicate that the study respondents were a more advantaged group.[15] Although demographic comparisons do not tap such critical dimensions of personality as motivation and resilience, the lives of the study respondents can make a real contribution to an understanding of the problems and the prospects of other New Chance participants.

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[15] GED holders in the interview study resembled other GED holders at the same sites in terms of educational attainment, marital status, AFDC history, level of depression, current use of birth control, and other important dimensions. Some of the differences between the study respondents and other GED attainers suggested that the study subjects were indeed better off: at the time they entered New Chance, interviewees were more likely to be living in households where their fathers were present (18 percent vs. 7 percent); their mothers were more likely to have attended college (15 percent vs. 6 percent); they were more likely to be living with someone who held a job (61 percent vs. 39 percent), to receive emotional support from a male relative who was not their father (24 percent vs. 10 percent), and to have a home phone (100 percent vs. 83 percent). On the other hand, other differences point to greater barriers to employment among the study sample: they had more children, on average (1.7 vs. 1.4); they had held fewer jobs in the past (2.5 vs. 3.4); and their reading scores were marginally lower (9.6 vs. 10.3, a difference significant at the .12 level).

Study respondents in the non-GED group tended to look more advantaged than nonrespondents in some respects: they were less likely to have left school before their first pregnancy and more likely to be receiving emotional support from the fathers of their children; their scores on a measure of self-esteem were also significantly higher. On the other hand, the interview respondents had worked fewer months during the year before enrolling in New Chance than had other young women who also did not get their GEDs through the program, and were also more receptive to the idea of having another child.

Part II

Chapter 2

The Road to Self-Sufficiency

On average, the 34 young mothers who got a high school equivalency certificate (or GED) did so about seven and a half months after enrolling in New Chance.[1] Their achievement was a proud and self-affirming event. Nerissa, a friendly, soft-spoken mother of three, said, for example, that she had gone back to school "to feel better about myself, that I can achieve something in life, and that I won't always be this nongraduate of *anything*. And so when I got my GED, I felt great. I don't think there's a time in my life that I felt better, other than getting married. I felt it was the most exciting time in my life."[2] The reward may have been especially sweet for Nerissa, who read at the 6.5 grade level when she entered New Chance (her reading score was the lowest of all the young women interviewed), because it was so long and hard in coming, involving two stays in New Chance. During the first, she took the GED test twice, failed it both times, and, after eight months, dropped out of the program. She had just learned that she was pregnant with her second child—a highly upsetting discovery, since her new boyfriend (and future husband) wanted her to have the baby, while her mother counseled abortion. After leaving New Chance, Nerissa got a job at a fast-food restaurant, where she worked at the minimum wage for three months before being laid off. She returned to New Chance when her baby was three months old and passed the GED test almost a year and a half after first joining the program.

Aside from raising these young women's self-esteem, the GED's immediate economic significance and other meanings are less clear. The statistics presented in the next few pages point to the chapter's major theme: the up-and-down course of participants' lives and the difficulty of achieving self-sufficiency. At the time they were interviewed, few of the GED holders were either fully and stably self-sufficient or had made no progress at all toward that goal, although some veered toward one extreme more than the other.

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[1] There was considerable variation—from one month to 24 months—in the length of time it took study sample members to earn their GEDs. It also took respondents at some sites much longer than at others: at one site, for example, respondents received their GEDs three months, on average, after entering New Chance; at another, the average length of time was 10 months. This variation cannot be explained simply by differences in the reading ability of enrollees at sample entry. In discussing such disparities, Quint, Fink, and Rowser (1991) cite differing practices concerning when enrollees were allowed to take the GED test, differences in length of time needed to schedule the test, and differences among states in test administration rules and passing scores.

Nine interviews with GED holders were conducted with respondents in each of three sites. Although nine interviews were scheduled at the fourth site as well, the last two respondents failed to appear for their appointments, and last-minute substitutes could not be found.

[2] To preserve confidentiality, the young women's names have been changed (sometimes to pseudonyms they themselves selected), and other minor identifying details of their stories have been altered. For ease of reading, quotations from the interviews have been edited by eliminating some (but not all) of the hesitations, false starts, "you knows," and other extraneous material. Standard (rather than phonetic) spellings have been used, but neither usage nor grammar has been altered.

Part II centers on issues involved in the young women's attainment of economic independence. The New Chance program has many additional goals—among them, helping participants to become more loving, competent parents and to behave as thoughtful, responsible citizens. These aspects of the young women's lives did not escape the interviewer's attention: she noted one young woman's especially harsh parenting style, for instance, as well as the easy and affectionate manner of many others with their children. But the research was designed to illuminate economic rather than non-economic issues.

This part of the monograph is divided into four chapters. After a statistical overview of sample members' activities during the post-GED period, Chapter 2 explores the meaning of progress for this group of young women. It proposes several criteria for gauging movement toward self-sufficiency that go beyond merely being off welfare at the time of the interview, and then profiles three young women who have made varying degrees of progress toward this end. These women exemplify, in their post-GED careers, the issues disadvantaged young mothers often confront, and the mixture of accomplishment and reversal in their lives. The profiles also try to capture some of the personal attributes—resilience and perseverance, inertia and resistance—that either strengthen or undermine a young woman's ability and will to move forward.

Chapters 3 through 5 cover the experiences of these young women in the workplace, at school, and in their personal lives. These three areas are ones in which even quite motivated young women can stumble and fail, and they are ones in which program intervention and changes in policy could enhance the young women's chances of self-sufficiency, as elaborated in the concluding chapter of the monograph.

Criteria of Progress

A young woman was considered to be headed toward self-sufficiency if she:

- had a realistic employment goal in view;
- was engaged in school, work, or training for a major part of the post-GED period;
- was in one of these activities at the time she was interviewed; and
- had earned or was en route to earning a credential that would enable her to get a higher-than-entry-level job.[1]

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[1] Given these criteria, should a young woman be considered as having enhanced her economic independence if she leaves welfare through marriage but otherwise does nothing to improve her human capital? The answer is a qualified no. Marriage is the single most important route by which women escape welfare; one study indicates that 35 percent of all welfare spells end when the female head of a welfare household becomes a wife (Bane and Ellwood, 1983). But the high rate of divorce among women who give birth as teenagers (see Furstenberg, Brooks-Gunn, and Morgan, 1987) makes it important, if not imperative, that young women be able to support themselves, at least in part.

A Statistical Overview

An underlying assumption of New Chance is that earning a GED is the first milestone on the road toward economic self-sufficiency and will be followed by another human capital-building activity to further strengthen the young mothers' skills and allow them to get better than entry-level jobs. Almost all the study subjects regarded the GED just as the New Chance planners intended, and attainment of this credential enabled 29 of the 34 young women to move on to community college or skills training. Those who completed a skills training course were able to command somewhat higher wages afterward; of the eight young women in this category, five held jobs paying $6 an hour or more, and some of these jobs offered fringe benefits as well.

The five young women who did not enroll in training or college all found jobs at some point, although they paid only the minimum wage or a little higher and rarely provided fringe benefits, and some lasted only a month or two. Some of these jobs may not even have required a GED.[4]

Thus, all of the young women who were interviewed did something to increase their chances for long-term self-sufficiency between the time they received their high school equivalency certificates and the time they were interviewed. None of the young women simply stayed home collecting AFDC during the entire period, which averaged 22.6 months for the sample as a whole and lasted from seven to 40 months. Figure 2.1 depicts the study subjects' highly varied patterns of post-GED activity; the figure shows what participants did, but not the proportion of time spent in each activity.[5]

The interview respondents were, in fact, considerably more active than other program enrollees at the same sites who also received their GEDs. Impact analysis data collected 18 months after program entry indicate that a higher proportion of interview respondents than of other GED holders at the sites had accumulated credits toward a B.A. or an A.A. degree (41.9 vs. 17.5 percent). Furthermore, a higher proportion of study respondents had worked for pay at some time during the 18 months (58.1 vs. 37.5 percent). These figures suggest that the young women who took part in the interview study may have been particularly motivated.

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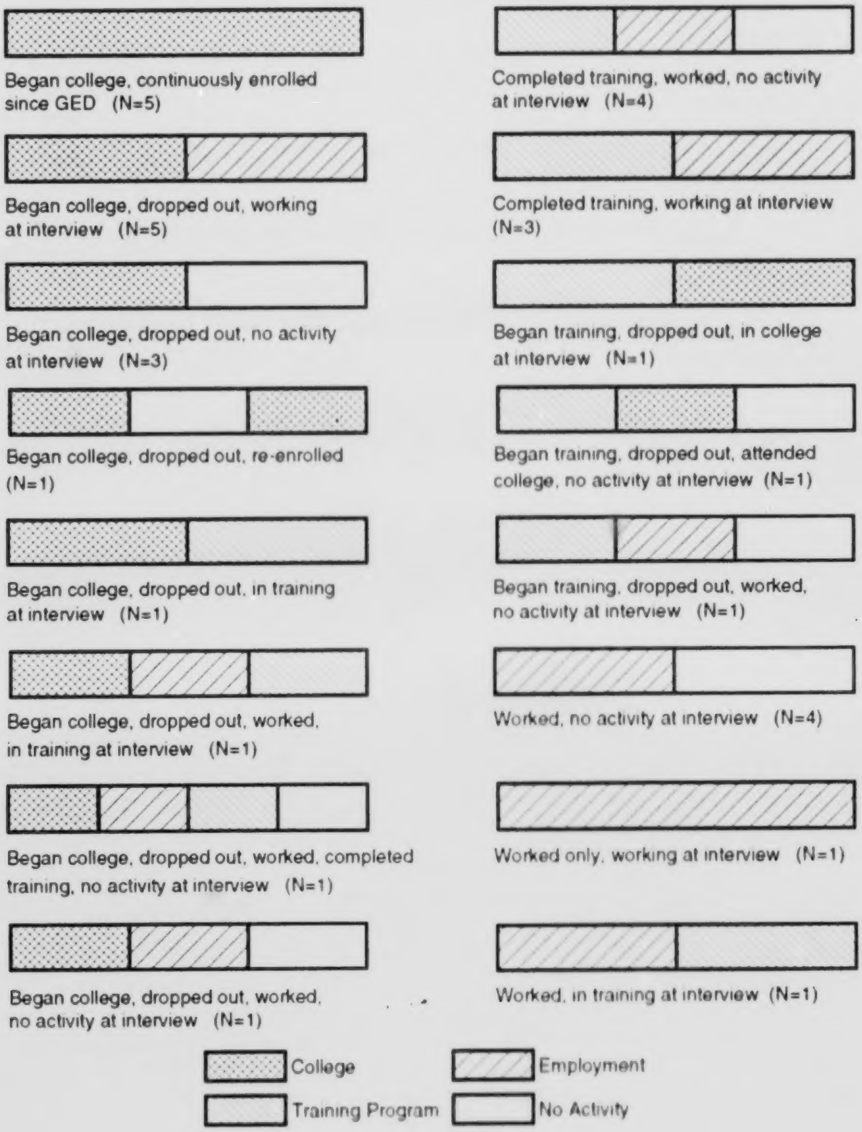
[4] Whether and to what extent receipt of a GED enhances earning power is a topic of some controversy. Cameron and Heckman (1993) conclude that getting a GED is not a worthwhile investment for young men who are high school dropouts: at ages 25 and 28, male GED recipients have wages and earnings no higher than those of dropouts without this credential. On the other hand, Murnane and Willett (1993) find that earning a GED has a small positive impact on the rate of wage growth for both male and female dropouts.

[5] There were marked differences in the post-GED activity patterns of respondents from the four sites. In one location where the community college system was especially well developed, eight of the nine respondents enrolled in community college as their first post-GED activity. Seven of the nine respondents at a second site entered college; the New Chance program director at that site believed that a college education offered the young women their best hope of escaping the large low-wage sector of the area's economy. At a third site, none of the respondents entered college; program staff at that site favored placements in shorter-term training programs. At the last site, six of the nine respondents entered training programs a year or less in duration; the remaining three started two-year college programs.

FIGURE 2.1

SEQUENCE OF POST-GED ACTIVITIES OF INTERVIEW RESPONDENTS IN THE GED GROUP


Began college, continuously enrolled since GED (N=5)
Began college, dropped out, working at interview (N=5)
Began college, dropped out, no activity at interview (N=3)
Began college, dropped out, re-enrolled (N=1)
Began college, dropped out, in training at interview (N=1)
Began college, dropped out, worked, in training at interview (N=1)
Began college, dropped out, worked, completed training, no activity at interview (N=1)
Began college, dropped out, worked, no activity at interview (N=1)
Completed training, worked, no activity at interview (N=4)
Completed training, working at interview (N=3)
Began training, dropped out, in college at interview (N=1)
Began training, dropped out, attended college, no activity at interview (N=1)
Began training, dropped out, worked, no activity at interview (N=1)
Worked, no activity at interview (N=4)
Worked only, working at interview (N=1)
Worked, in training at interview (N=1)
College
Employment
Training Program
No Activity

But greater motivation did not translate into lasting accomplishment. The achievements of study respondents at the 18-month point were not noticeably different than those of other program enrollees (except in their accumulation of college credits). Similar proportions of study respondents and other GED holders were employed at 18 months, and similar percentages were also receiving welfare.

Although the interview respondents were more likely to initiate various activities than other young women, they did not necessarily remain in these activities. Young women who enrolled in college were at especially high risk of dropping out; 14 of the 20 young women who ever entered a college program left school before completing it. The finding raises questions about whether earning a GED constitutes sufficient preparation for college, an issue explored in Chapter 4.

Figure 2.1 indicates that 22 of the 34 young mothers had worked for pay either full-time or part-time at some point since receiving their GEDs. But only nine were employed at the time they were interviewed, and several of these seemed to be at risk of losing their jobs (sometimes because of factors beyond their control). At the interview, 15 of the 34 young mothers were neither in school or training nor employed (although one of the 15 had finished a training program a few weeks before and was looking for work, while another was due to start a job the following Monday).

Moreover, 25 of the 34 respondents were still receiving AFDC when interviewed. Some of these women were relying on welfare to support themselves and their families while they attended college or a training program; some were receiving supplementary benefits that augmented their earnings from low-wage jobs; and some had lost their jobs and were back on the welfare rolls. For a few, welfare threatened to become a way of life. Nine young women were no longer receiving AFDC, although some continued to receive Food Stamps and Medicaid. Four of the women who were off the rolls were married or living with stably employed men whose earnings were critical to the young women's economic independence. The young women who have attained self-sufficiency, like others, have faced reversals in the past, and the ability of several of them to maintain ongoing financial independence appears uncertain.

Realistic Career Goals

In general, respondents had employment ambitions that seemed in line with their interests and abilities and with their immediate financial resources. Nerissa, whose expression of excitement about receiving her GED opens this chapter, is a case in point. Although she had harbored a longtime dream of being a child psychologist, she turned her sights to the career of early childhood teacher after her college counselor and her aunt, a professional woman prominent in the community, urged her to think about a career that would not require years of college and graduate school. Nerissa explained her change of goal:

> I enjoy teaching my daughter [now five years old]. I enjoy working with some of the kids her age. I enjoy that. I'm not so much really giving up on psychology. It's just that I'm looking at a more realistical goal for the near future instead of the far future. Because like everyone said, you want to be able to do something

> that you can go ahead and work, but at the same time, it's a field that I enjoy, which is working with children and teaching them. And . . . and yeah, I guess in a way it's a type of psychology of a child, when you have to find out what's going on with the child. And I do plan to still go on and work towards the doctorate's degree [in psychology]. But right now, I'm looking at a more, just a more realistical goal.

Nerissa, who had dropped out of college, talked of returning when her children (the youngest of whom was under a year old) were somewhat older. In the meantime, however, she was willing to take any job whose location and hours were convenient, since her husband was unemployed and the young family was struggling to make ends meet.

Similarly, Letrice had thought about becoming a dentist, but after leaving college, she enrolled in a dental assistant training course. In general, New Chance staff were concerned not to dash a young woman's aspirations (however unrealistic they might seem, at least in the short term) but at the same time to expand her sights to include more attainable goals.

Twelve of the young women interviewed were interested in office careers (e.g., secretary, receptionist, administrative assistant, accountant), and medical occupations (e.g., nursing assistant, medical assistant, dental assistant, and RN) were the choice of another dozen respondents.[6] A few young women had more unusual career goals (physical therapist, probation officer, police officer, architect, child care worker, welfare worker), and four wanted to work but seemed utterly at sea about what they wanted to do. These preferences reflect the young women's general lack of interest in occupations that are nontraditional for women. Although the New Chance sites made some (often not concerted) efforts to expose students to nontraditional but well-paying jobs, the interview respondents, in common with other young women at the sites, were principally interested in traditionally female occupations.

While most of the young women expressed an interest in employment for which they seemed reasonably well suited, two of them appeared headed in the wrong direction, given their abilities or personalities. Thus, Julia, a slight young woman who looks more like a high school sophomore than a 22-year-old, started an accounting program at a local community college. Asked why she had made this choice, she sounded both realistic and muddled:

> I was never good with numbers and math and adding and everything, and I thought, well, this is a good opportunity for me to get better at my math, and learn a little bit about computers, and it has a little bit of everything in it. So that's what I liked about it, too. And I figured everybody could always use an

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[6] These categories are somewhat arbitrary. For example, Katrina had earned a certificate as a medical assistant but was open to office jobs. And Century had wanted to become a minister since she was 16 ("I grew up in the church"), but realized she needed to do something to support herself while she was in school; she decided to pursue an LPN certificate, but hopes eventually to attend seminary.

> accountant, you know [she laughed], that's one job that's always going to be around, I guess.

For Veronica, now 23, the issue was temperament rather than ability. While in New Chance, she often made cutting remarks about her fellow students, criticizing their dress and calling them fat and ugly. After receiving her GED, she got a subsidized, short-term position as a receptionist for a city agency. She found unsatisfying many aspects of the job, including answering the phone:

> Sometimes I couldn't deal with those ignorant people that called in. You tell 'em once, and they still kind of like didn't get it, and here they are yelling at you, you know, and you have to be nice at all times. You know what I'm saying? And it kind of made me angry, and they'd curse me or tell me I'm dumb or stupid. And all I could say, "Well, I'm sorry." It's not my fault, anyway, so why should I say I'm sorry?

She also disliked the attitudes of her fellow employees: "I tried to maintain a pretty nice relationship with them all. But some of 'em were so funny-style. It was like you had to really work your brain to see if they're in a good mood or a bad mood, and I feel like I didn't want to do that, that wasn't my job." When Veronica's supervisor diplomatically suggested that she think about another line of work (he said that being a receptionist or a secretary was probably not her "knack," but that she had "great potential"), she took his advice. Deciding she needed additional skills, she enrolled in a vocational school, and was three months into an administrative assistant training course at the time she was interviewed. Asked what an administrative assistant does, she replied:

> I think it means you're kind of like over other people—other people in the office, mainly. And you're giving orders, you know, you're making sure that things are done correctly, not a lot of answering telephones, not a lot of typing, not a lot—that's more computer work than typing, you know. Less running around. I mean, secretaries, you're just, like, on your feet all day, practically. . . . It's not as exhausting as secretarial work.

Later, pressed further about the distinction between the work of a secretary and that of an administrative assistant, Veronica acknowledged:

> I tell you, I don't know any administrative assistants, but one of the brochures that they had and one of my counselors, well, she gave me a brief description. They do half of what secretaries do. The other half is overseeing, making sure things are done correctly. Like, say, for instance, you're over maybe like a section of the medical records. You make sure that the people who make records do their tables right and everything in the way that it's supposed to be done. Then, they stand around and . . . you know. I like to oversee a lot. [Laughed.] But it's just about half of secretarial work. Yeah. The only way that you would really have to dig in and really do, if some of the workers wasn't there to do it.

Certainly, many young people in their early twenties like Julia and Veronica make false starts, trying out and discarding various career possibilities before they find something to their liking. But Julia and Veronica have little leeway for making such mistakes. For one thing, welfare agencies often pay for only a limited amount of training (many states allow a maximum of two years of postsecondary education), so that a year spent on training for a career path that one subsequently elects not to pursue may be a year wasted, foreclosing any further opportunity to acquire other job skills. It may mean also that the young woman and her children will remain longer on welfare and in poverty.

What is particularly striking about the cases of Julia and Veronica is that their mistakes seem avoidable. With adequate career counseling, Julia would have known that accounting is a good choice for people who are good at math, not bad at it; and Veronica, that an administrative assistant often (although not always) does the same work as a secretary. It is not clear that in either of these instances the career counseling provided by New Chance was at fault. Both young women were no longer engaged in regular activities at the New Chance program site: Julia was enrolled in a community college, Veronica in a vocational school. These institutions were ostensibly responsible for providing career counseling. The point is that someone failed to do it, leaving each young woman to suffer the consequences.[7]

"Time on Task"

Respondents varied widely in the amount of time spent in school or training or at work following receipt of a GED. Julia, the would-be accountant, and Kelly illustrate the end-points of the "time on task" continuum.

Kelly remained continuously involved in training or employment during the 29 months after receiving her GED, except for three months she spent looking for work. A motivated but extremely obese young woman (she lost over 50 pounds while she was in New Chance but subsequently regained them), Kelly successfully completed an office skills training course but was unable to find a private-sector job. She was eventually hired by the welfare agency, first for an unpaid "workfare" position and then for a nine-month subsidized job, at which she was working at the time she was interviewed.

Thirteen months elapsed between the time Julia received her GED and the time she was interviewed. She enrolled in college but dropped out near the very beginning of the term when her daughter became sick and was hospitalized for over a week. During the next year, Julia essentially stayed at home with her daughter; at the time she was interviewed, she was uncertain whether she would return to school, get a job, or both. Along with her daughter's illness, an unintended pregnancy and a passionate romance consumed her energy and attention and disrupted her progress. Already several months' pregnant when she started college, she opted to give the baby up for adoption, an act that she felt was right but caused her considerable pain and estrangement from her mother, who wanted her to keep the child. Shortly thereafter, she became deeply involved with a man with whom she lived for a while and who she hoped would marry her, but who turned out to be abusive (and possibly involved in illegal activities as well).

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[7] In fact, as discussed below, Julia dropped out of college within the first few weeks because of her daughter's illness. Veronica's success as an administrative assistant will remain uncertain until she has completed her training course and pursued employment in this occupation.

Some respondents—particularly those enrolled in college—resembled Kelly in remaining active in school, work, or training virtually throughout the post-GED period (including attending summer school). A few did almost as little as Julia. But the majority fell someplace between: they were engaged in school or the labor force for substantial periods and were out of these activities for months at a time as well. This mixed pattern of activity was characteristic of many of the young women who seemed headed toward self-sufficiency as well as of those whose course appeared less promising.

Mercedes, who has two children, spent in college or training 12 of the 29 months that elapsed between the time she received her GED and the interview date; during the remaining 17 months she was neither in school nor working (except for occasional housecleaning). Despite this unequal distribution of time, she emerged as one of the more successful respondents. Immediately after earning her GED, Mercedes enrolled in a community college as a human services major but found her sociology course very difficult. She soon became pregnant with her third child, was in a serious automobile accident when she was driving while intoxicated, dropped out of school, and lost her motivation to do anything else. Her baby, born eight months later, died within hours after birth, and she was depressed for some time. When she came out of her depression, she decided to enroll in a training program to become an accountant, but because she had dropped out of college, the local JTPA coordinating agency refused to pay for her child care for her two children.[8] Eventually, the JTPA coordinator relented, and Mercedes was able to enroll in the program. She earned good grades there and was due to receive her certificate a couple of months after the interview. Her case manager commented, "She has turned her life around."

Mary got her GED two years before the interview; for 18 of the 24 months, she was in school or working. Having begun a pre-nursing course at a local community college, she dropped out, exhausted, after three semesters, and spent the next six months "good-timing it—going out, relaxing, you know, just maxing and relaxing, just freedom. Wake up when I want to, go to sleep when I want to." She also looked on and off for work and eventually found a job with a cleaning service whose hours and location were what she wanted. As she explained, "Nothing really said, 'Stop good-timing it. Go to work.' You know, nothing like that. I found a job that was suitable to me." Mary did some, but not all, of her "good-timing it" at the public's expense. Off welfare at the time of the interview, she left the rolls before becoming employed; the $135 a week in child support she receives from the fathers of her two children far exceeds her former welfare grant. Mary hopes to return to school and ultimately become a nurse.

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[8] Funding provided under the Job Training Partnership Act of 1982 (JTPA) supports programs providing skills training and other employment preparation activities for the economically disadvantaged.

Marlene's post-GED career, also 24 months long, involved a series of alternations between periods in training or employment and periods in neither of these activities. After earning her GED, she enrolled in a three-month typing course to get her speed up to par and then entered an eight-month training program to become a medical assistant. In the interim, she became pregnant but had to terminate the pregnancy for medical reasons. It was a difficult event—"just too much to take on," she says; and she took a two-month leave of absence from the training. After completing the course, she spent several frustrating months seeking employment: "I looked for a job, and I looked and I searched and I still couldn't find one." When she finally found a job with a group practice, she was laid off after two and a half months; she suspects that she lost the position because of the office manager's prejudice against minorities. For the next three and a half months, she stayed at home, using the time to plan her wedding and taking care of her children. Eventually, she grew bored and contacted her former training program for job leads. Just the day before the interview, a large local hospital offered Marlene a job, and she planned to start work the following Monday.

Anita divided the 32 months between receipt of her GED and the interview almost evenly between time in school or training and time at home. But at the interview, she seemed far from success. After getting her GED, Anita enrolled in a skills training program. Five months later, a teacher, with whom Anita acknowledges that she didn't get along "for nothing" (and toward whom Anita was verbally abusive), accused Anita of cheating. Anita hotly denied the accusation and left the program.[a] The next month, she enrolled in a proprietary college notorious for its exploitative practices; she also became pregnant. She continued in school until her eighth month of pregnancy; but when she tried to re-enroll the next semester, after her daughter's birth, she was told that her student loan had gone into default and that she would have to pay $500 in order to return. Out of school for a year and a half at the time of the interview, Anita believes her outstanding loan will prevent her from being admitted to another training program. She speaks of getting a job but—aside from a couple of days of volunteer work in lieu of paying a traffic-violation fine and a month in a job search class run by a community agency—has done little to find one. Part of the reason may be that she broke up with her live-in boyfriend and has no one to take care of her children.

The experiences of these women, and of many others, suggest that spending an adequate amount of time on a task is a necessary but not sufficient condition of being categorized as headed toward self-sufficiency. The factors that impede progress toward self-sufficiency fall into two general categories: the strengths or liabilities that a woman brings to her post-GED experiences, and the external circumstances of her life. The first of these will be discussed in the next section.

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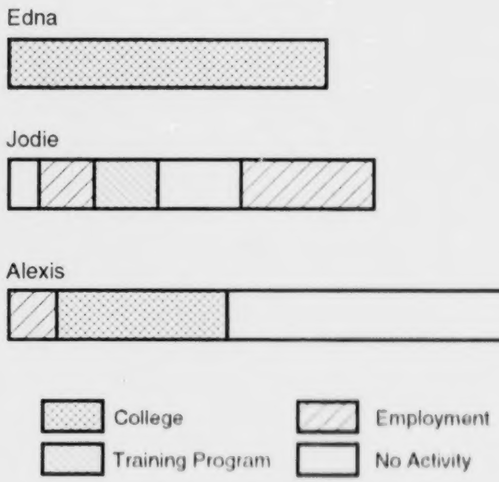
[a] Despite repeated probes, Anita did not disclose this incident to the interviewer; the information about her experience in the training program came largely from case file notes and her former case manager.

Personal Factors

The analysis that follows is based on the experiences of all 34 respondents and illustrated by the profiles of three young women—Edna, Jodie, and Alexis—whose post-GED activities are pictorially represented in Figure 2.2.

FIGURE 2.2

CAREER PATHS OF THREE GED RECIPIENTS



Edna and Jodie have made considerable progress toward self-sufficiency, although they have often had to deal with people and circumstances that could hold them back. Their profiles illuminate a number of the elements that contribute to this success. They suggest that the young women who were more successful in this regard shared certain attributes and social supports that are discussed at greater length below.

Fierce Determination: Edna

The expression "fierce determination" epitomizes Edna, now 22. Her strong will seems to account in large part for her progress, more than compensating for her average academic achievement (she read at a 7.9 grade level) when she entered New Chance. Her attendance was nearly perfect, and although she failed the GED test the first time, she was adamant about wanting to graduate with her other friends in the program;[10] she retook the exam and passed it, five months after entering New Chance.

In the 19 months since then, she has been continuously enrolled in a two-year business skills training program offered by a community college, attending during the summers as well as the school year. She has a full course load and spends three or four hours each evening doing homework. Her schedule leaves her little leisure time: "I hardly don't talk to a lot of my friends. I only talk to them every now and then when I have time, like I said, because I'm hardly never home. [She likes to study at the public library.] And when I am here, I'm studying, and I don't have time to be talking on the phone." Her efforts have been rewarded by a 3.85 grade average.

Edna wants to escape the straitened economic circumstances and financial worries of her parents, with whom she and her five-year-old daughter now live. Her father, a construction worker, has been out of work for about a year and a half. Although both of her parents are high school graduates, Edna's mother is "old-fashioned" and stays at home. Edna sees the need for families to have two incomes, and ascribes part of her family's difficulties to the fact that her mother isn't bringing in any money. She dislikes being a party to her parents' economic woes. "All the problems they have with all the bills and everything financially, all she [her mother] does is tell me about it. And I don't need to hear that." Edna would like her own place and has applied for an apartment in a low-income housing development.

Her mother, while helping out considerably by caring for her granddaughter while Edna goes to school, provides little psychological support:

> My mom tells me, "All you want to do is study. All you want to do is read. That's all you want to do." You know, "Stop doing that," she tells me. There's times where she gets upset, she just tells me, "You think, you know, you're really smart. You think you're going to get somewhere, and you're not. Watch, at the end, you're not." And there's times where she tells me, "Oh God, you know, hopefully all this is going to benefit you. Hopefully, you know, something good's going to happen in your life." And it's like, I don't know. She's just two different people. So it's like, I don't expect anything from her because of the fact that, you know, she tells me things like that, and I don't know if she just has her old-fashioned ways of being.

On the other hand, Edna feels her father approves of her going to college, although he has said little about it. And her sister has been a source of unswerving emotional, financial, and practical support: "I really speak to all the time my sister . . . and she's the one I'm really close to. She's the one that helps me out financially or when I have a problem, I go to her. So she's the main one that really helps me out, has helped me out through . . . everything. So she's what really . . . has always encouraged me to continue, no matter what happens." Her sister, a secretary in a law firm, can also give Edna practical advice: "She kind of tells me, you know, things to look out for."

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[10] Most New Chance sites stage an elaborate ceremony, often including awards, speeches, and refreshments when young women receive their GEDs. Such ceremonies substitute for the rituals that one has missed by dropping out of high school, and foster a sense of individual importance and accomplishment.

Edna started receiving AFDC when she was pregnant and has been on the rolls for six years. For the last couple of years, she has been using public assistance as a vehicle for moving forward and for investing in herself, although she is not yet self-sufficient. The gains she has made have come at the cost of stress-induced illnesses and isolation from friends. Her personal life appears uncertain: right now, she is committed to remaining with a man who is likely to try to hold her back. She has been seeing Pete for four years. Throughout that time, her relationship with him has been marked by ambivalence. On one hand, she knows that Pete resents the amount of time she spends on her studies, and she recognizes that he is jealous and fearful that she will leave him for someone more successful. She professes to be her own woman in the relationship: "I'm not going to rush anything until I'm definitely sure that his goals are set for my future, because I'm not going to rush into a relationship where it's not going to work. So, we'll see." On the other hand, she cannot see leaving him "because I've been with him for so long," and she describes herself as "not the type of woman to be dating one man and another." She is determined not to have another child unless and until she marries, "and if I get married to the one person I've been seeing now." She uses the pill faithfully, despite headaches and nausea, feeling she has no good alternative; Pete uses condoms as well. She may yet change her mind about staying with him; she is a very attractive young woman.

After she receives her skills training certificate, Edna plans to get a job as an administrative assistant. Her father gave her a car several years ago, and she says she is willing to get up at four o'clock in the morning and travel a considerable distance for a job she enjoys. She is looking for a position that offers fringe benefits and pays $9 an hour (a wage she feels is reasonable given what friends with similar credentials are making), and expects to have little difficulty finding one. Once she is working, she is also determined to continue attending college part-time for an associate's degree. Ultimately, she plans to become a paralegal. She has always been interested in the field of law (an interest acquired from TV shows and books); she learned about paralegal work in New Chance.

Edna's experience at college has been highly positive. She feels that her teachers know her—"They know me pretty good; I conversate with them all the time when I go to school"—and that teachers and counselors have been highly supportive. In particular, they urged her to remain in college at a time when she felt overwhelmed by financial pressures and was thinking of dropping out of school to enroll in a six-month training course that would have enabled her to get a job more quickly:

> I'm glad I came to my senses because of the fact that I started realizing now I would have enough skills and knowledge, I'd rather be going to college and taking each course by course, because, right there, I can gain the knowledge by taking each course. And when I do go out working, I'm going to be able to feel

> good about myself, and when they ask me a question, I'm going to know. That, as far as if I would take a six-month training, I would not know those things.[11]

Edna's post-GED contacts with New Chance have been limited. Nonetheless, she ascribes her determination to the help and information she received from all the program's staff members. An interview probe reveals another, more personal source of motivation:

> As far as anything else, I've learned it on my own because of the fact that I had such a hard time, and that I got pregnant when I was 16, which I didn't want to. I always had been the type of person thinking, "Okay, I'm going to go to school, I'm going to do good, and eventually I'll have a career in my life, I'll get married, and I'll have children." I seen my life that way. My life didn't turn out that way. So since it didn't turn out that way, I was kind of hurt, and the only people I had to speak with were the people at New Chance. And it's like I never want to see myself in that situation again. Financially, I do not want to be in that situation, never. And I wouldn't want to see my daughter in that situation. And that really hurt me because of the fact that I got pregnant at 16, that the person that I was with, the guy, he lied to me, he told me he was going to marry me, he told me a bunch of lies, which once he found out I was pregnant, he just left. And, to me, that was a real . . . I was real depressed for a long time, for a lot of years. All those years that I didn't go to school, I was really depressed. I was just in my room, I didn't know what to do. . . . And I just never want to see myself that way again. So that's why I have all this determination to do something, because I don't want to ever feel that way again.

A Striver: Jodie

Jodie, a tall, pleasant young woman of 22, has made considerable strides, especially in view of her limited academic proficiency. (She read at a 7.0 grade level when she entered New Chance.) She took 15 months to get her GED: after failing the test the first time, she grew discouraged and took a four-month leave of absence from the program; when she rejoined, she did well, earning the certificate four months later. One month after that, she gave birth to her third child.

Jodie has spent most of the 22 months between the time she received her GED and the interview either at work or in training. Within a few weeks after giving birth, she began working at a Summer Youth Employment Program job, then completed a three-month nurse's aide training program at a local technical school, and, at the time of the interview, had been working for eight months at a nursing home. Jodie was strongly motivated to work and get off welfare (which her family had received all the time she was growing up), and the short-term nature of the training appealed to her.

Jodie says she always wanted to be a nurse, modeling herself after two older sisters who had also become nurse's aides. Her sisters told her about the patience the job requires and the need to avoid becoming overly attached to elderly patients (although Jodie says that she has cried when some of her patients have died). But her sisters have also been a source of much pain for her: "There was a time when I looked up to 'em, when they were working, you know, and stuff like that, so, being that, you know, they're all on drugs, it's like, really hurted me." Although Jodie sees her sisters, she feels she can't continue to be so involved with them:

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[11] The importance of being adequately prepared—of not appearing ignorant on the job—is a theme that recurs through a number of interviews.

> I even tried to help 'em to get in programs and stuff like that. And it didn't work. . . . I tried with doin' it, and it's like, oh! It's . . . they're my sisters, I don't want to give up on 'em, but I don't have no choice but to. Because they're not really going to do nothing for theirselves unless they want to.

Jodie's two best friends now are strivers like herself. She met one in New Chance, the other in the nurse's aide training program. She talks occasionally with her New Chance case manager. And she says she is also close to her mother, who worked for 20 years in an elementary school cafeteria when Jodie was growing up and is now retired. Her mother, Jodie reports, was pleased by her efforts: "She was proud of me, for going to school, going back to school, finishing, you know, getting a career and stuff. She was really happy for me."

Jodie liked the training program instructor very much and enjoyed the small, intimate atmosphere. (There were only 20 students in her class.) She found the courses "very interesting" but enjoyed her clinical internship at the Mountainside Nursing Home even more, even though she had to get up at 5 A.M. so that she could deliver her children to her mother's place before taking the 40-minute bus ride to Mountainside. At the end of the program, she took the test for certification, passing the written part but not the clinical part, which required demonstration of various techniques—she was too nervous, she explains. She retook the test and passed the clinical part a few months later, by which time she was already working full-time at Mountainside. She had been offered a job there when she completed her internship but preferred a position closer to home. Without her certification, no offers were forthcoming, and she took the Mountainside job, working the 3 P.M. to 11 P.M. shift: "I didn't have no other choice."

Jodie's experiences at the nursing home have been mixed. She enjoys caring for the patients, she appreciates the fringe benefits (which include medical and dental coverage, sick leave, tuition should she decide to go on for an LPN degree, and a two-week paid vacation), and she likes the money. Her wage has gone up from $6.80 to $7.20 an hour during her time there, and she feels she is better off now than when she was receiving welfare (in part, because her mother provided free child care):

> The amount that I was getting before—it was just enough to get by on. But, the amount what I'm making now, within two weeks, is enough to pay your bills *and* have a little bit extra money to the side. To do things with the kids, or buy something for the house, or, you know, for yourself or the kids. So, that's enough, you know.

On the other hand, Jodie dislikes the gossip that circulates around Mountainside[12] and is even more resentful of what she sees as the intrusiveness of some of the LPNs.

> There is some LPNs that will, like, snoop behind you to see if you doing your work, you doing it the right way. And I don't like that. 'Cause I know what I'm supposed to do. . . . You don't have to go and backtrack behind my work. I don't like that. If there's something I missed or I didn't do, tell me.

Riled by one LPN in particular, Jodie (at least by her own account) handled the situation in a mature way:

> I didn't have to go really to the supervisor, 'cause I pulled the LPN to the side and told her, "You know, you might be older than me, but have respect for me, I'm going to have respect for you, you know. You're . . . you're older than me, what-all, but I have kids, too, I'm grown up, too." So we pretty much got a understanding, about that.

Asked what she has learned about herself on the job, Jodie replied, "How to deal with other people, criticism, and stuff like that, and their attitudes and things like that. I've learned to deal with that a lot."

During her eight months at Mountainside, Jodie has received one written warning for lateness and one for having called in sick when her sick leave had expired (she was out for several days with the flu). She wants to look for employment elsewhere ("I'm just, like, hanging in there, you know, as long as I can") but has not yet started to look for another job. One disincentive to leaving is her expectation that she would have to drop back to her entry-level wage: "Well, with three kids, the money [a difference of 40 cents an hour] is important, really." And she is philosophical: "I mean, a job is a job. Anywhere you go, there's going to be people there that you probably don't like, so it's just, I'm dealing with it." There's one thing she is certain about: she won't quit Mountainside until she has another job lined up.

Although Jodie wishes she could spend more time with her children, she would rather be working than staying at home:

> I was just at home, like, I mean, I would be spending time with the kids. In the house, watching TV a little, listen to music, or something like that. It would just really be . . . it wouldn't be boring, being with my kids, but I wouldn't really be doing nothing. And then, I don't really want my kids just, you know, notice me just being at home. Just like, "Mommy's just at home, not really doin' nothin'." I want my kids, like, "Well, my mom always worked for us." Then I give them a good, you know, a sight of seeing that, "My mother worked, then I could do it, too."

Jodie has managed to remain on track despite serious disruptions in her romantic life. She had planned to marry Alan, the father of her third child: "We had went and took the blood test and everything." But Alan got into a bitter fight with the father of another of her children and decided he would be wise to leave the city. They have remained in touch, and he has invited her to visit him in his new home. But she doubts they will get back together: "I don't know, because from the two years that we've been away, he probably changed, I probably changed, you know." For the past three months she has been seeing William, a cook at a local restaurant. She wants very much to be married and "settled down," but isn't yet sure William is the one. This uncertainty may itself be a sign of greater maturity, since her case manager commented that one of the things holding Jodie back when she first entered New Chance was her feeling that she couldn't function unless she had a man—any man—living with her. She is open to the idea of having another child should she marry, but in the meantime, three children are enough, and she has had Norplant inserted.

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[12] Dislike of workplace gossip is a recurring theme in the interviews.

Now Jodie has to cope with another problem. Her mother, long a dependable source of free child care, grew tired of the drug addicts, robberies, and killings all around her and decided to move back to North Carolina, her birthplace. In order to continue working, Jodie must find someone who is willing to watch three children at a reasonable cost. She had also planned on going on for an LPN certificate, but without her mother's assistance, she may not be able to manage a year-long—and difficult—training course, a full-time job, and three young children, especially since she is not a fast learner.

Alone and Adrift: Alexis

A leggy redhead of 22, Alexis lacks the personal strengths and social supports that have helped Edna and Jodie. Thirty-three months after receiving her GED, she is discontented with her current situation, but seems stuck, without a clear vision of where she wants to go or how to get there.

She comes from a middle-class background, but her parents divorced when she was ten, and shortly thereafter, her mother began drinking heavily, leaving Alexis to raise herself and her younger sister. Alexis says that her mother has never been supportive of anything she has done: "I feel like she never wanted me to be better than her. I mean, she's always expressed—she's been jealous of me, you know, and I just. . . . She was never really my friend. She never tried to act like my friend, or be much of a role model at all." According to Alexis, her mother made her drive her around to bars at all hours of the night.

Alexis dropped out of school in the twelfth grade, became pregnant, and joined New Chance when her daughter was a year old. She read well (10.9 grade level) when she entered the program and, within four months, had taken and passed the GED test. Her parents' bitter divorce had piqued her interest in a legal career, and she followed her case manager's suggestion that she enter a two-year paralegal training program offered by a local community college. (She filled in the time between receiving her GED and the start of the new semester by working at an unpaid "workfare" job in a welfare office.)

College demanded more of Alexis than she had expected: "I enjoyed it—but . . . it was just . . . mind-boggling. I get frustrated easy. I think I just got frustrated because I was falling behind." She felt that "other people were a heck of a lot smarter" than she was, and law was a more complicated subject than she had anticipated. "I enjoy law, but just the fine lines in it, you know, got so confusing, and I'd get frustrated. I kept with it for a while and was going to go into tutoring to help me understand all the different principles and fine lines, and I was, like, forget it."

She was also having trouble balancing her various responsibilities, especially when she started an afternoon work-study position in the local district attorney's office:

> It was *hard*. Phew! Because I'd get up early, go to school in the morning, and then right after school, I didn't have time to eat lunch, 'cause I had to go over to the D.A.'s office. And then lunch was over when I got there, so I didn't get to eat, and then I'd work until 4:30, battle rush-hour traffic, pick up my daughter from daycare, come home, try to clean, cook, do homework. It was . . . I was *overwhelmed*. It was hard. By myself, it was hard. That's part of the reason, too, why I hated that, 'cause I couldn't spend any quality time with her. I mean, I tried. Whenever, chance I had, we'd go to the park or whatever, but . . . it was hard.

Alexis was also disconcerted by the sexual advances of one of the attorneys in the office: "And it kind of discouraged me. And I just kind of lost interest after that. I don't know why I do that. I'll start something, and then I quit. And it's so frustrating. But . . . I ended up quitting." In fact, Alexis ended up not quitting but getting fired from the work-study job after one month because she was absent so much.

Alexis was further distracted from her studies by her romance with Mike. She disliked and had stopped taking the pill, and was surprised and shocked when she became pregnant almost immediately. (She had thought she would remain "safe," reasoning that "it would take a month or whatever for everything to be out of your system"), and she and Mike never bothered to use condoms: "We weren't usin' our brains." Their relationship had gotten off to a rocky start, and both Mike and her mother wanted her to have an abortion, but Alexis refused to do so. Although now she says an abortion would have gone against her beliefs, in fact she did consider this option seriously and even went with Mike to a clinic for counseling. When the nurse asked Mike if he would want the baby to bear his name, Mike replied, "No." Alexis was enraged: "I got mad, I got up and I punched him square in the mouth. Went out of there, 'cause I was just . . . couldn't believe it, couldn't believe that I got messed up with a jerk like that."

Shortly after Alexis learned she was pregnant, she dropped out of college. Mike became more accepting of the pregnancy as it progressed, and Alexis was pleased by his behavior toward her older child and toward their new daughter when she was born. But when the baby was ten months old, Alexis came home from shopping and found her with an enormous bruise and welts down the right side of her face. After she confronted Mike, who had been babysitting that day, he ultimately confessed that he had struck the child. Alexis had him arrested: "I was numb for like a week. I couldn't believe it . . . it took a while to sink in."

Two months after the abuse, Alexis was deeply ambivalent in her feelings toward Mike. On one hand, she says: "I've expressed to him, I think he should be nailed to the wall, I mean, you know, he should sit in jail. That's how I really feel. He was kind of hurt that I feel that way, but I don't care, when it comes to the safety of my kids." She says she doesn't see the two of them reconciling; she has lost trust in him. On the other hand, she would like to get back together:

> I mean, I still love him, you know. And I really feel he's sincere and sorry for what he'd done. He put himself in classes, even counseling, and I told him, I said, "I just don't know." . . . I mean, I can't believe he did what he did, it's so hard. He was such a good parent to both the girls. My older one considers him, calls him Dad, and that's all she knows. So, at this point, I don't know.

And asked whether she would eventually like to have another child, she said, "Oh yeah, I know I'll have another one. And I hope it's with Mike. I mean, I hope, that's all."

Alexis had been staying at home for over a year and a half at the time of the interview. Now that she is on her own and the baby is a year old, she is thinking of getting a job. She has no specific career in mind: she is no longer interested in paralegal work and knows, too, that she would not like nursing or a sedentary office job. One possibility would be to work with the airlines, since a new airport, which will provide many jobs, is under construction. Alexis knows a woman who makes salads for an airline and someone else who vacuums the planes, and both of them make "good money." She wouldn't want a minimum-wage job, but figures she would accept a job paying $5.00 or $5.50 an hour if it offered health benefits. (Her older daughter is asthmatic, so she regards medical coverage as a must.)

Alexis says that she would like to make decent money so that she can get out of the low-income housing development where she lives, which has "too many degenerates." When asked why she used that term, she replied:

> Just, because a lot of the mothers and stuff, they're quite a bit older than I am, and their children are in school and stuff, and they still . . . they're B.S.ing their way with the Social Services to get their welfare check, and they don't want to go out and get a job, and it's just... laziness, and it makes me mad because... I feel they should be working, because there's other people who need housing like this. More so than they do, you know, and they should just get their lives together and move on.

She says that she is using welfare "properly," differentiating herself from welfare abusers like her neighbor, who uses her money to buy "dope, beer, or whatever." At the same time, Alexis believes that her self-esteem, which she recognizes is shaky, would be higher if she were working instead of receiving assistance.

Alexis has the insight to acknowledge that, while she doesn't like being on aid, "if I didn't like it that much, I wouldn't be on it." And her job search to date has been desultory. She has called only a handful of employers and not followed through with these: "One thing I don't understand is, what is a telemarketer?

Telemarketing in US West—would that be the operator, or . . . or what? I don't know, because I don't like sales. Telemarketing to me is like calling, selling." When asked if that was what she had been told the work would involve, she answered: "I didn't ask. It was like a recorded message. 'Job openings.' I should probably call up and ask." Asked why she hasn't looked more actively, she replied, "My attitude, basically. I mean, some days I'd feel real up about it, and some days, I was like Aaagh! Maybe you're catching me on an up day. No!" (She laughed and speculated that she would be working in a couple of months.) In fact, Alexis says that, although she knows it's impossible, she would love to stay home and raise her children. She is not bored staying home and enjoys the "routine, everyday, happy housewife type thing."

For about a year, she has been involved with a program for young welfare mothers. She meets with her program counselor periodically; they discuss vocational possibilities, and the counselor has given her some job leads. (Until recently, Alexis was not required to participate in JOBS because she had received her GED and her younger child was under one year old.) The counselor also referred her for group therapy, and she has been attending that once a week for about six months, using the sessions as a forum to talk about her relationships with Mike and with her mother.

Aside from her counselor and a couple of older male friends, however, Alexis seems to have few social supports. One of the most painful things she has done is to sever her ties with her mother:

> Recently, I told her, "I don't need you in my life," and, "Get help. 'Cause if you don't, I'm saying my goodbyes now," because she's not going to live that much longer. I'm just not going to put myself through the hell she put me through for years. I don't want to put my kids through it. Just kind of cut the . . . cut the victim strings, so to speak.

But the emotional separation is far from complete. During the interview, Alexis commented, "I hate her. I don't hate her. I just dislike her a great deal. And I kind of . . . just, I don't know. I hate going over stuff like that. I'm trying so hard not to think about that, but I know I never will forget."

Alexis also grew angry or hurt about something her New Chance case manager did or didn't do—she says she can't remember what it was—and has lost contact with her: "I don't get along with many people, I guess. I don't trust many people at all, which is fine with me, you know . . . sort of. I'm working on it."

These profiles, along with the briefer descriptions of other respondents earlier in the chapter, suggest that young women who made real progress toward self-sufficiency had certain assets that their less successful counterparts were likely to lack. Some of these might be termed "character traits": strong motivation, independence, resilience, and personableness. Edna and Jodie were intent on securing a better living standard for themselves and their children. Edna's motivation stemmed in large part from her resolution to avoid the depression in which she had been mired after her daughter's birth, as well as to escape the monetary worries of her parents; Jodie's wish to avoid the fate of her sisters, who are drug addicts, is a plausible explanation of her drive. Although Edna has had a long-term boyfriend and Jodie would like to marry and "settle down," both young women are also committed to making something of themselves, rather than relying on a male partner for financial support.

It is not clear whether Alexis—or Julia, who has also made little progress toward self-sufficiency—looked to a long-term relationship with her boyfriend of the moment as her principal source of economic support. Nonetheless, both young women subordinated their career plans to these relationships; their attention turned to employment only when there was no man on the scene. Their self-esteem was low, and they looked to romantic partners as a source of good feelings about themselves; thus, they were upset when one relationship ended, but quick to plunge into another one. Their dependence left them unable to recognize the shortcomings of the men with whom they were involved, or irrationally hopeful that each man would undergo radical transformation. It is a sign of Jodie's increasing emotional maturity that she was able to escape this pattern of thought and behavior.[13]

The young women who made more progress were also willing to make choices that sometimes went against the wishes of significant others. Although Edna's mother, for instance, criticized her daughter's absorption in her studies, and Marlene's mother opposed her working, these young women were able to assert their right to determine the course of their own lives, and to act on that assertion.

Many women faced a number of problems, but those who progressed further were able to recover reasonably quickly from adverse circumstances. Thus, while Edna, for instance, frequently suffered from stress-related illnesses and at one point contemplated dropping out of college because she felt overwhelmed by financial pressures, and Jodie underwent the breakup of a major relationship, both were able to put these events behind them and to move forward with their lives. In contrast, dropping out of college derailed Alexis's progress for more than a year and a half, and she seems obsessed by her conflicted feelings about her boyfriend.

Finally, the young women who advanced further were both personable and popular, and felt themselves to be so. In sharp contrast, Alexis has few friends because she says she finds it difficult to trust others. Veronica's cutting remarks to her fellow students appear to be in part a cover for her own insecurity. And Anita was described by her case manager as "crude, rude, and sharp" and a "rabble-rouser." A pleasant personality is an important asset generally, but may be even more so for young women whose other assets are limited, since it may increase the willingness of others (and particularly, of helping adults) to reach out and provide assistance above and beyond the required minimum.

Besides these personal attributes, the young women who appeared more successful at the interview differed from those whose progress was more limited in other respects. For one thing, they were more likely to have a long-standing and relatively well-informed interest in a particular occupational area. Jodie knew from an early age that she wanted to enter the medical field; her older sisters had worked as nurse's aides and were able to tell her a great deal about the nature of the work. Edna's interest in legal matters sprang largely from reading books and watching TV, but she, too, had an older sister who was a secretary in a legal office and could tell her what to expect as a paralegal. Alexis harbored a long-term interest in the law, but she knew little about what paralegal work entailed, initially confusing the position of paralegal with that of court reporter. Once she learned more about the job and the knowledge required to perform it, she lost interest. A pre-existing interest in a line of work is not a necessary condition of progress toward self-sufficiency—a young woman could make a false start but subsequently identify a line of work for which she was better suited, as Mercedes did—but it is clearly a significant factor. Indeed, the fact that most respondents were in their early twenties, when young people from all social classes often try out different occupational areas before finding one that truly engages them, suggests that Mercedes's path may be more common than Edna's or Jodie's. In the short term, however, those young women who had a clear idea of what they wanted from the outset tended to do better than those who did not.

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[13] From a psychological perspective, it is not surprising that the young women who seemed unusually dependent on men also had emotionally withholding mothers from whom they had difficulty separating.

Young women who advanced further were also more likely to have occupational role models—people with whom they had forged emotional bonds and who were working in their area of occupational interest and could provide guidance and support. Thus, Edna and Jodie had their sisters, and Marlene's role model was a New Chance staff member who was a physician's assistant. In contrast, Alexis, Veronica, and Julia knew no one who was actually working in the occupational area each had selected.

A negative role model may be important, too, in providing a model of what a young woman does not want her life to be like and must consciously strive to avoid. Jodie's motivation to succeed may well arise in part from a desire to be unlike her sisters who, though formerly doing well, became seriously addicted to drugs. Edna, too, differentiates herself from her stay-at-home mother.

Another factor helping respondents' progress was support from family members, and especially from a mother. Support could take many forms: expressions of pride in a young woman's achievements, sympathy and reassurance when problems arose, financial assistance, and help in juggling her responsibilities. While Edna's mother is unreliable as a source of emotional support, Edna's sister has been there for her at every juncture. At the other extreme, Alexis's alcoholic mother has been such a burden to her daughter that Alexis is seeking to end the relationship completely.

One of the most important ways in which respondents' mothers offered support was by providing child care. Edna and Jodie, for instance, relied heavily on their mothers for babysitting. Without this assistance, it is doubtful that Edna could have put so many hours into her studies; and if Jodie had had to stretch her $7.20 an hour wage to pay for child care for her three children, she might well have found working less financially advantageous. If Alexis or Anita go to work, they will have no one to watch their children for free. (One young woman was especially aware of the high cost of care for her two young children: she reasoned that she and her boyfriend could escape this burden and get ahead financially only if they worked different shifts, so that one of them would always be available to watch the children.)

Finally, successful respondents have retained their ties with New Chance or formed connections with other helping adults. Jodie is still in occasional touch with her New Chance case manager or other program staff, as are Marlene, Mercedes, and Kelly. Edna acknowledges that her contacts with New Chance are limited but has become close to some of her college teachers and counselors. In contrast, Alexis and Julia no longer have any connection with New Chance, although Alexis has recently begun to receive outside assistance in working out her many personal problems. Ties with helping professionals are important for several reasons: they can help prevent young women from being permanently thrown off course by obstacles in their paths; they can expand the practical resources and knowledge available to young women whose families and friends may not be able to supply this information; and they can reassure the young women that others appreciate their striving and their struggles.

Additional Observations Regarding Movement Toward Self-Sufficiency

The young women examined in this chapter are in transition between adolescence and adulthood; they are in the process of consolidating an identity that incorporates new, more mature roles as woman, mother, student, worker, wife, girlfriend. That process is not yet complete.

One consequence of the fact that their lives are in flux is that young women who were judged to have made more progress toward self-sufficiency at the time of the interview might have been evaluated quite differently if the interview had taken place at a different point. Had Jodie been interviewed 10 months rather than 22 months after receiving her GED, she would hardly have been considered successful: she had completed a training program but not received a certificate, and was still unemployed. Had Mercedes, who now appears headed for self-sufficiency, been interviewed a year earlier, she would have emerged as a college dropout with a drinking problem. Had Mary been interviewed six months earlier, she would have been portrayed as another college dropout, one who was "good-timing" it at the public's expense; instead, she is a self-sufficient young mother who is off welfare and appears determined to stay that way.

Because their lives are in flux, and because they are still growing up, young women who do not now appear headed in a positive direction may well alter their course in the future, as in the past. Alexis, Julia, and Anita all express a desire to work. At this point, Alexis's and Julia's preoccupation with personal and romantic problems is blocking their ability to move forward in other areas; but they may change with increased maturity and self-understanding. Anita faces problems finding low-cost child care, but when her baby is old enough for preschool, her life may look very different. And the young women's lives may also change if they participate in programs that seek to move welfare recipients into the workforce, whether such participation is voluntary or required as a condition of continuing to get aid.

Parenting concerns could conflict with the self-sufficiency goals of New Chance. Two young women—Patricia and Yvonne—were clear about why that they had decided to remain at home and out of the labor force until their children are older—and why, consequently, they have made relatively little progress toward self-sufficiency since receiving their GEDs.

Patricia had dropped out of college a year before the interview, having fallen behind in her course work and being about to deliver her second child. Since that time, she has stayed at home, living with her boyfriend and his family in a pleasant, middle-class area. She collects AFDC for herself and her children. Although she is bored at home, she does not intend to return to school or look for work until her infant is a year old: "That's just my own personal, because I'm nursing, you know. I nursed Christopher [her other child] for a year. And I feel it'd only be fair for this one if I nursed her for a year. You get the bonding and all the love and attention for the first year. . . . We'll struggle for a little bit, but not too much." Patricia has a good deal of work experience and expresses strong motivation to advance economically, although she has no particular career goals in mind.

After receiving her GED, Yvonne, who wants to become an RN, held a New Chance-arranged work internship in a nursing home. She quit after about two months, citing her distress at seeing the nurse's aides and LPNs speaking roughly to the patients and even hitting them. At the time of the interview, she had been at home for more than a year and a half, except for a brief stint at a telemarketing job. Her explanation is that she wants to wait until her daughter, now four, is old enough for a full-day kindergarten. She claims there is no daycare center—and for that matter, no one except her mother—that she trusts to take care of her daughter. She also wants to shelter her child from the drugs and violence and "negative people" who live all around her, feeling that if she raises her right at this juncture, her daughter won't, like so many other children, end up in the streets, using drugs, or dead. Once her child is in kindergarten, Yvonne plans to enter a training program. She figures that without additional training, it won't be worth her while to work, because the rent in her subsidized apartment will increase to reflect her earnings, and she will lose Medicaid coverage.

Time will be the test of whether Patricia and Yvonne will translate into actions their expressed intention of rejoining the world of work. At this point, all that seems clear is that their futures are unclear.

At the same time, the progress of some respondents appears fragile, susceptible to reversal by changes and circumstances over which the women have little or no immediate control. Jodie managed to advance quite far, but throughout she depended on her mother's ability to provide free child care to her three children; how she would fare after her mother moved to North Carolina was an open question. Kelly did well at her welfare department job, but the position was temporary; there is no guarantee that she will be "rolled over" into a permanent position. In a society that regards fat as an aesthetic affront, if not evidence of a character flaw, her obesity (which seems at least in part a response to the stresses she faces) puts her ability to find a private-sector job into serious question.

Kelly's case offers an important reminder that what young women bring to their post-GED experiences constitutes only a part of what contributes to their success, the other part being the situations they encounter in the worlds of employment, college, and training. If each young woman's prospects for success are thus dependent on the interaction between the personal resources and social supports she brings to a situation and the demands of that situation, the absolute level of personal and interpersonal resources she has at her disposal may be less important than whether these resources are adequate to meet the demands she confronts. Such demands can be formidable, as is demonstrated in the next two chapters, which deal with the respondents' experiences in the work world and in college.

Finally, there are limitations in the study's emphasis on self-sufficiency as the principal marker of success, as in the case of Ashley. Twenty-four years old, no longer receiving AFDC at the time of the interview, she had as her most important personal triumph something of a quite different nature.

Both Ashley's parents were alcoholics. Ashley had her first child at 16, and three more children within the next four years. She completed her GED in New Chance within four months; the same month that she received her certificate, she broke up with Tom, her common-law husband and the father of her four children. She dropped out of New Chance, was reinstated, but was subsequently terminated again because of absenteeism. She avoided the efforts of staff to contact her, and a case manager believes she was drinking heavily at the time. Ashley then discovered crack and quickly developed a habit that ran her between $100 and $200 a day. Realizing that she could not care for her children properly, she asked her husband to take them and herself moved in with a series of friends and relatives while working at a couple of jobs her brother and sister had gotten for her. Once, working as a bus girl, she nearly blacked out, spilling a tray of water glasses on a group of diners. Ashley went into treatment after she had been on crack for about six months, but she did not cease use altogether until the day Tom and she reunited; at the interview, she had been clean for 15 months. Tom works for his brother's construction company and is putting his skills to use in rehabilitating a formerly condemned house for his family. Ashley is unsure what she would like to do in the future, but once her youngest child is old enough for preschool, she plans to enter a training program.

Chapter 3

From Welfare to Work and (Sometimes) Back

Almost two thirds of the respondents (22 out of the 34) worked for pay at some point after receiving the GED; some of them held two or more jobs during this time. (Of those who did not work, the majority were in college or training through most of the post-GED period; the others, like Alexis, had started college, dropped out, and then stayed home.) The length of time they held a job varied considerably. At one extreme, Margaret had, at the time of the interview, been working at a fast-food job for 15 months, and had been promoted and received a salary raise of 75 cents, to $5.25 an hour. (Ultimately, however, she planned to leave the job and resume her studies to become a physical therapist.) Nerissa, on the other hand, worked only a month at her fast-food job and quit because she felt her supervisor was treating her unfairly. (Margaret also had quit a previous fast-food job for the same reason.)

Nine young women held a training certificate: one had obtained hers before joining New Chance, and the remaining eight completed skills training after receiving their GEDs. These young women were generally employed in the fields in which they had been trained: receptionist for a small company, medical assistant in a doctor's office, or nurse's aide in a nursing home.[1] Their wages ranged from $5 to $8 an hour, and some of the jobs offered benefits as well (or would have if the young women had held them long enough). Training programs appeared to vary in the degree to which they helped graduates find a job; a job developer with the New Chance sponsor agency helped one young woman find a job as a receptionist.

Those without training certificates held less-skilled, lower-paying jobs that rarely provided fringe benefits. Of the 13 young women in this category, only four found jobs paying $5 an hour or more, two of them as employees of the local government. Several young women worked in fast-food establishments or discount department stores; others were employed in telemarketing or as maids in motels. Unlike the jobs held by training program graduates, some of the jobs held by those without certificates were seasonal—extra sales positions over the Christmas holidays, for instance. The young women generally secured these jobs without any outside assistance.

Whether or not they required training, most jobs were entry-level and offered little in the way of career ladders or upward mobility. This may have undercut the young women's sense of loyalty or commitment to a particular job or workplace. It may also have reduced employers' commitment to their employees. Where jobs are low-skilled and high turnover is expected, supervisors do not need good interpersonal skills; if one employee quits a job or is fired, another person will soon come along to fill the position.

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[1] There were a few exceptions to this rule. Kelly had received a certificate in accounting, but her job with the welfare agency did not draw on her accounting skills. Century, a determined and resourceful young woman, first completed a nurse's aide training program. She then enrolled in LPN training but dropped out to take care of her four children, all sick with chicken pox, and of her great aunt, who was dying. During the time she was at home, she taught herself WordPerfect using the computer at the public library. When her great aunt died and she grew tired of being at home, she registered with a temporary personnel agency and was doing clerical and data entry work at the time of the interview. She planned, however, to re-enter the LPN program later in the year.

Fewer than half, only nine, of the 22 young women who had ever worked were employed at the time of the interview. (As noted in Chapter 2, Marlene planned to start a job five days after the interview took place.) Graduates of vocational skills training programs were somewhat more likely to be employed at the interview date than were nongraduates, but the majority of respondents in both these groups were not working.[2]

There are two principal explanations for job retention being the exception rather than the rule, often existing in interaction with each other: the attitudes and life situations a young woman brought to the workplace, and the realities she encountered there. To illustrate this dynamic, this chapter examines, first, respondents' reasons for leaving a job; next, two issues faced by a number of young women, whether or not they remained employed—racial and ethnic discrimination in the workplace, and the young women's difficulties in dealing with supervision and authority; and finally, their attitudes toward public assistance and toward the trade-off between working and welfare receipt. The chapter closes with reflections about the role of programs like New Chance in helping young people to prepare for work.

Young Women's Reasons for Leaving Employment

Most of the respondents who left a job quit on their own. Of three young women who were fired or let go, two—Marlene and Katrina—are discussed below and illustrate the kinds of issues young women confronted on the job, as well as the personal barriers that could interfere with their keeping one. The third woman, Letrice, was fired from one fast-food job because she didn't work fast enough; she had previously lost a position at another fast-food restaurant when the woman with whom she was living, and who cared for her child while she worked the evening shift, went on a two-week vacation to Mexico with her church group. Letrice had no one else to turn to for child care; she asked the manager whether she might bring her baby to the restaurant, but he refused.

Although Dolores was working at the time of the interview—in fact, the date of the interview was her one-year anniversary—she had been given a final warning and suspended from work for a week because of excessive lateness. Her case illustrates how a variety of personal difficulties—some of her own making, some not—could interfere with workplace performance and lead to termination.

Dolores, her three children, and her boyfriend of two years, Tony, live in a pleasantly furnished duplex apartment in a public housing project lost in the hills of the city where she lives and far from public transportation and other services; the area is one of high crime and vandalism. Dolores was a nurse's aide in a nursing home. In nice weather, she liked to walk to work; if she was out the door at 6:30 A.M., she got there at 7 A.M., just in time for the start of her shift. In cold weather, she took a jitney cab: the driver picked her up at 6:45 and charged her $3 each way for the trip. Since her children didn't have to leave for school until 7:30, Tony saw them off in the morning.

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[2] Of the nine respondents who had received a training certificate and been employed, three held a regular job when interviewed, and a fourth worked on and off for a temporary personnel agency. In comparison, only five young women of the 13 who had ever worked but had not completed training were employed at the interview date.

Tony is a drug dealer and has, for much of the time Dolores has known him, been in and out of jail. During his most recent spell in jail, she stayed home to see her children off and lock up after them. She repeatedly called her supervisor to report that she could not come in before 7:30, and consequently, was suspended for a week. When asked whether she could have given a key to her oldest daughter, aged eight, and asked her to lock up, Dolores explained the difficulties of living where she does:

> I could have, but the door's kind of hard to lock. You know, if people up here . . . like this door right here, that's boarded up? They kicked her door in, 'cause she went out of town. She ain't do nothing to nobody, but they just kicked her door 'cause she went out of town. And I been living up here for almost two years, I ain't never done nothing to nobody, but my door's kind of hard to lock. And if you don't turn it the right way, you hear a click, but that don't mean it's locked. And I'm just thinking my daughter's going to make a mistake, you know.

The interviewer did not ascertain whether Dolores had explored other options that would have permitted her to get to work on time: replacing the lock on her door, finding a neighbor with whom she could leave the children until it was time for them to go to school, teaching her daughter to use the key correctly. Ending her relationship with Tony might simplify her life, but this she was unwilling to do. While she deplores the way he makes a living, she sees him as generous and dependable. And she has been with him longer than with any other man.

Dolores resented her week's suspension and seemed to think that her supervisor should excuse her lateness because she believed she had a good reason for that lateness.[3] She was also especially indignant about the punishment meted out to her because she sees nurse's aides and nurses being treated very differently for the same behavior:

> The head of the place, you know, it's like her way or no way. She'll get on us about the aides coming in late and what we're doing, but a nurse could come in every single day late, and you say, "Okay, well, if you're going to bawl me out about being late, what about her?" "Oh don't worry about her, worry about yourself." And I think that is very, very, very unfair, you know? Very unfair.

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[3] She exemplifies this comment by one New Chance staff member: "They [the program enrollees] think a good excuse for not doing something is as good as doing it."

Dolores's bitterness toward her supervisor may be detrimental to her ability to keep her job. At the same time, the objective reality of Dolores's situation forces her to confront a problem that a working mother living in a safer neighborhood might not even imagine.

The respondents who left jobs on their own volition did so for a variety of reasons. Only one young woman, Mariah, quit a job at which she seems to have been essentially happy: she was working part-time as a cashier, but her boyfriend wanted her to stay home with their son. Margaret, Nerissa, and many other women had problems with a supervisor, and this was the single most commonly reported reason underlying the decision to leave a job. Sometimes it existed in conjunction with other reasons. Claudia, for instance, quit work because she was having a difficult pregnancy, but her departure may have been hastened by an argument with her supervisor; difficulties with supervisors are discussed later in this chapter. Other young women left jobs because they disliked either the nature of the work in general or some specific feature of it. Veronica quit the receptionist job where she had to deal with "those ignorant people" to return to school. DeeDee left a job as a cashier in a bakery after two months: she described it as a good job (and especially liked getting paid weekly), but said she had to stop "'cause working them hours on my feet [six and a half hours a day, six days a week], standing on my feet that long—I couldn't do it." In addition, she felt that, because she was working so many hours and on weekends, she never got to see her two children.

After dropping out of a paralegal training program, Gloria took a part-time (five hours a day, six days a week) job as a telemarketer with a water-softener company located near her home. While she disliked one of her four supervisors, she disliked the work itself even more: "I didn't like calling people. [Laughing.] No way." When asked what she didn't like about the calling, she replied, "Just calling and bugging them. Sometimes we had to work on Saturdays, and on Saturdays we started work at 8:00. You had to call people, and usually they're still sleeping." Although the job paid $4.50 an hour with no fringe benefits, Gloria received a bonus for every survey she was able to complete over the phone and a $20 bonus for every home demonstration she was able to set up. She soon found that most people would hang up on her, but she figured out a way to enhance her income:

> I used to call my aunts, because I have a lot of family [her parents had 13 brothers and sisters], I used to survey them. And then I'd have the demonstrator go over to their house, and I'd get an extra twenty bucks. [Both interviewer and respondent laughed.] You're not supposed to do that. But I did, so. . . . I said, "Come on, you got to do this, I get an extra twenty dollars in my check." So they would do it.

Gloria reasoned that she was justified in enlisting her relatives' cooperation because they, too, would get something for participating (e.g., movie tickets, a certificate for dinner at the Red Lobster). Asked if they were continually hassled by the company, she acknowledged laughingly that she had never asked them.

Gloria calculated that she was better off working than on welfare by about $200 a month. (Her grant was cut completely, although she continued to receive Food

Stamps.) Nonetheless, after about two and a half months, she quit the job. Some of the other telemarketers had been absent so often that she had to work 12-hour shifts for two weeks straight. She was pregnant at the time and got sick, and her doctor told her to take a week off from work: "And they got mad. So I just didn't go back." (It was unclear from this account whether Gloria called in advance to tell the company she wouldn't be coming in, or simply returned from her week off with the doctor's note in hand.) The argument provided an opportunity for Gloria to leave a job she intensely disliked.[4]

Problems of the Workplace

Dolores's perceptions were typical: the most pervasive and insistent theme in the young women's descriptions of their experiences in the workplace is that of *perceived inequality*. In a small but significant number of instances, that inequality took the form of racial and ethnic discrimination. In many other cases, the repeated mention of this issue reflects respondents' difficulties in dealing with the authority structure of the workplace.

Racism and Other Forms of Discrimination

Five of the 22 young women experienced what they felt to be racial and ethnic discrimination. Their stories are important because they reveal some of the subtle and not-so-subtle ways in which discrimination takes place: favoritism, accusatory looks, lack of sociability, denigrating comments, rude behavior, pay differentials. Young people may find it particularly hard to cope with such behaviors if they have not yet developed strong self-esteem, assertiveness, and other defenses. The narratives also illuminate some of the external barriers to job placement and occupational advancement that nonwhites may confront.

However hurtful and annoying, some discriminatory practices were not seriously harmful. Sally saw that the words and behavior of some of her fellow employees were clearly racist (they might, for instance, distribute candy to white colleagues but not black ones). Her attitude was philosophical: "There's nothing you can do about it. You know. You can't tell someone how to feel about someone else, if they've been raised that way. You could only, you know, just suggest it to them." Mary was well aware that her white supervisor let white employees pick up their paychecks a day early but made the black workers wait until payday.

Margaret, an intelligent and ambitious young woman, disliked taking on certain responsibilities at the fast-food restaurant where she worked because of the racist sentiments she expected to encounter:

> I don't like handling all the money that I have to handle. Because, at some point or another, cash will be short in a restaurant or anyplace like that. And, I just

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[4] Telemarketing is generally a high-turnover occupation in which pay is low and there is little chance for upward mobility (personal communication, Angela Karr, editor, *Teleprofessional Magazine*, August 20, 1993). Only one of Gloria's four supervisors was still working for the water-softener company a year and a half later.

> don't like being around it, because of the fact that I'm black and the majority of the people there are white. And these are like the prime candidates for, like, racism, there. They pretend like they're not, but they really are. And if some money is short, they generally look at the black person. Whether or not you've handled the money that day, they'll generally look at you like, "The money was short today."

When asked whether she had had any shortages, she responded in the affirmative:

> There was a shortage last week of nineteen dollars. And the manager looked at me, "Well, do you know what happened to it?" I said, "I have no idea." [She laughed.] I said, "I'd like to know myself, 'cause I counted it." And she was like, "Well, did you count it correctly?" I said, "I always count the money three times." And the manager kept coming up to the same amount missing. And, actually, it was another relief manager's fault that there was that much money missing. He had had to take out money to get something from the store, and he hadn't put the receipt in there. So . . . I didn't get the apology for the look or for them thinking that I had taken anything. 'Cause you can . . . I could really see it in their eyes. It's not like I'm having . . . you know, I wasn't having a paranoid fit or anything. But you could see it.

Margaret also recognized that the manager's racist attitudes spilled over into the restaurant's hiring practices:

> There've been a lot of black people that have applied to work there that they have not hired. And there was a couple that had been working in another [name of fast-food restaurant], so they wouldn't have to be trained as much as other people, that they did not hire. She [the manager] said it was because it just didn't *feel* right to her. They have to have . . . she has to have a certain feeling. I was like, how . . . wha . . . what does a feeling have to do with whether or not a person's qualified?

Although the situation angered Margaret, she did not say so, as the manager was her supervisor. "This is my boss, yeah, so. . . . Basically, I just kept my thoughts to myself."

When, after two and a half months, Marlene was laid off from her job as a medical assistant with a group practice where she was the only nonwhite employee, her mother suggested that she had been the victim of employment discrimination. While working there, Marlene had not been conscious of being discriminated against, but afterward, her mother's explanation for the layoff seemed plausible to her, although the story as she told it points to other possible reasons:

Marlene reported that she was getting positive feedback from the other employees about her work, which largely involved back-office procedures (performing EKGs, taking patients' histories, drawing blood samples, etc.):

> Well, they were telling me that I was doing a good job. The doctor would tell me, "Oh, you're doing just fine," and the people who trained me, the two medical

> assistants who trained me, they says, "Oh gosh, you're doing real good." The other girl that was there before me, she like trained me on the extern [the clinical part of her training program], and they says, "Well, how could she train you? You know more than her."

Marlene got along well with one of the three doctors in the group practice, but she had some initial difficulties with a second:

> I'd forget to put something out for her, and she'd get really mad—"I needed this!"—and she'd start hollering. And I was like, "Gee, I forgot. I'm sure you forgot things, too," you know. So, that was about it. We didn't really talk or anything.[5]

The third doctor may not have given Marlene a clear sense of how well she was doing:

> She always used to tell me, "Oh, you're doing so good, you're doing so good." But when the office manager told me they had to let me go, she said, "Oh, and Dr. Andrews said that you're too slow." I says, "Well, Dr. Andrews told me that I was doing good, 'cause I asked her, 'How am I doing?' and she's like, 'Oh, you're doing fine.'" I says, "Why can't she tell me, you know, like, 'Pick up your speed a little bit,' or whatever."

Marlene felt that the office manager, her immediate supervisor, was the most prejudiced of the lot. She noted that their contact was limited to brief, often brusque encounters: "I'd tell her that I need to talk to her, and she was like, 'Oh, okay, what do you want?' just right there in front of everybody, but everybody else, she was, 'Okay, let's go to my office.' And that's what I didn't like." Marlene also noticed that the employees treated minority patients differently from other patients:

> They had a mixture of patients, but when Mexican people would come in, Oriental people would come in, they'd tease them, they'd laugh at them. . . . You know, you're not supposed to do that, and they don't do it to their face. But they do it after they leave—"Did you see what she was wearing?" and ha ha ha. And "Did you see how she was talking in Spanish to her son?"

When Marlene was laid off, she was told that the reason was that the practice would be opening a new office, for which front-office skills were required:

> What she [the office manager] said, she said that in order to open up the new office, we had to be able to order supplies and call in lab requests and stuff, and she says, "And you weren't able to do that." She wrote a note why they let me go and stuff. And she says, she said on there, "You weren't able to do it," and I called her back, and I says, "How do you know I wasn't able to do it? You never gave me that chance to do it." 'Cause they always had their certain people to do

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[5] It was unclear whether Marlene's response—"I'm sure you forgot things, too"—is what she actually said to the doctor or merely what she was thinking.

> certain things, and they never gave me that chance. . . . And I know I could have did it.

It is obviously impossible to determine from this account why Marlene lost her job. She may have performed her tasks slowly, or her interactions with the doctors may have been strained. And discrimination may also have entered into play. Marlene's use of nonstandard English—her "I know I could have did it" is a memorable and poignant example—may have, in reflecting her status as a lower-income member of a minority group, worked against her, especially since the group practice was looking to fill a position involving considerable telephone work. Speech functions as a signal of social class and, sometimes, of ethnicity in America; it may also be taken as a signal of intelligence, however unfair to the speaker this may be. The vast majority of young women interviewed, both white and nonwhite, spoke nonstandard English—a factor that may block their ability to rise further in occupations that require significant contact with the public unless at some point they become better able to express themselves in standard English. It is interesting, although perhaps entirely coincidental, that in her new hospital job, Marlene is to sterilize instruments and assist in the operating room—tasks that involve little or no interaction with patients.

However ambiguous the reason for Marlene's layoff, Nina's case appears to be one of straightforward wage discrimination. Already stressed by other events, Nina was so angry when she learned that she was being paid less than her counterparts that she quit her job after five months. After Nina received a certificate as a medical secretary, it had taken her some time to find a job she really wanted, working full-time at two franchises of a nationwide chain of opticians. (Between graduating from training and taking this position, she held two part-time jobs.) Nina and another Mexican-American young woman were employed at the stores as optometrist's technicians; so were two white young women. All the optometrists were white. Nina was excited when she started, but she soon found that she didn't get along well with one of her white co-workers:

> I thought she was a fake. When the doctors, our bosses, were there, she would act like she was working real hard, but when they weren't around, she would sit around and talk to her girlfriends, her boyfriend on the phone. That used to make me really angry. And I seen it, no one else did, and that made me frustrated.

She was also annoyed that the other technician consistently came in late, while she was always on time. And she was irate that a supervisor automatically credited this young woman with a job done particularly well when it was actually Nina who had done it.

Nina also noticed that the optometrists did not treat all the technicians equally, that she and the Mexican-American woman were slighted:

> You could just see in how they talked to you. They really wouldn't ask . . . they never really came up to me and asked me to do something for them, they always asked one of the other [white] girls to do something for them. And I seen that on

> my own, and then my girlfriend had talked to me about that, too, and I said, "Yeah, I feel the same way." We both saw it, and we never had really talked about it till actually we both had really felt that way. But I guess just in the little things that they did—the way they talked.

When asked whether she felt the optometrists were less respectful or just less friendly, Nina said, "Less friendly, a little, and I wouldn't really say 'respectful' 'cause they really never talked to me, so I would . . . I would put it as less friendly."

Around the time she quit, Nina was experiencing a great deal of stress, anyway. Her husband, who was in the military, was about to return from service in the Gulf War. Nina also felt that she was unfairly blamed for a mistake the optometrists had made. The last straw came, however, when she found out that she and the other Mexican-American employee were earning less than the two white women, although all four had been employed for about the same length of time:

> And then that was also when I had felt like there was discrimination, 'cause she tried, I guess, rubbing it in my face how much money she made—she had never went to [vocational] school like me and the other girl that were working there, she didn't go to school. . . . And she was kind of rubbing it in, how much more money she made than me, and I wondered why she made more money.

Nina said that she had started off at $5.50, and the two white technicians were making $6.00: "And that wasn't a whole lot of a difference, but there was a difference, and I thought that was wrong." The night she quit, Nina learned that she was going to get a raise: "I was due for my raise, and it was only going to be $5.85, and I'm still even going to be making less than them, and that just really ticked me off." She quit without giving notice: "I just straight out—just left."

Nina acknowledges now that she "jumped the gun." Now she knows she should have talked to a supervisor about the wage differential; then she did not: "I didn't talk to no one about it and thought, well, I'm just going to quit my job and find another job, and I don't need this." In retrospect, she feels she was reacting to a number of pressures: "I think everything was kind of, like, combined, and it just made me explode, and I just kind of did something that . . . I should of took a little more time to think about."

A year after quitting the job, Nina says of her behavior at that time:

> I have a lot of regrets. I felt bad that I didn't talk to him [the optometrist] about it. I think maybe I was looking at things in a . . . at a different point of view—I don't know. At the time, I had strong feelings about quitting. I seen things and it hurt me . . . and I just made a spur-of-the-moment choice. I think I made the wrong choice, but I learned—I learned a big lesson.

As discussed later in this chapter, programs like New Chance can help participants develop a repertory of responses to discrimination, so that they are not driven like Nina to abandon otherwise useful and profitable jobs.

The Young Mothers' Problems with Authority

Many respondents, out of both idealism and naiveté, seemed to think of the workplace as a democracy, with all employees being treated equally. They came to find instead that the workplace is characterized by hierarchical relationships, with different expectations and privileges attached to different positions on the organizational ladder. They also discovered that because they were at the bottom rung, they received the fewest "perks." This was a common cause of resentment. Like Dolores, who was indignant that nurse's aides were expected to be in on time while nurses could regularly arrive late without being rebuked, Claudia was angry when her supervisor chastised her for taking a day off to be at the bedside of her grandmother, who had been hospitalized with a heart attack, when the supervisor herself took an afternoon off to be with her husband, who was having a vasectomy.

Twelve of the 22 respondents who had been employed during the post-GED period expressed negative feelings about their supervisors; and five reacted so strongly that they left their jobs. The following case studies of Katrina, who was fired, and of Natalie, who quit, illustrate the difficulties with supervisors that respondents experienced.

Katrina worked for three and a half days a week as a medical assistant at a group practice where her boyfriend's aunt, Marsha, was the office manager and her immediate supervisor. At first, Katrina liked Marsha a lot, and Marsha seemed to reciprocate: "She told the whole family how well I was doing, she told me that I was doing very good and she was very pleased with everything, and she goes, 'I know things are going to work out.'" Over time, however, Katrina came to dislike certain things about Marsha. For one thing, the manager was racially prejudiced. For another, she was hypocritical. Through her boyfriend and his family, Katrina learned facts that contradicted the way Marsha presented herself:

> She really acted so, so religious, and she hid everything behind her religion. . . . You could hear her talking about gay people. And that really, really bothered me, because her stepson died of AIDS, and he was gay, and she was putting these people down like she was . . . you know, she never had to go through that, and acting so innocent. It was really hard to deal with.

Katrina increasingly came to feel that Marsha was treating her unfairly. She believed that Marsha showed favoritism toward another employee, Ellen, who had been there for many years, and that as a result, she was often blamed for things that were really Ellen's fault:

> Well, for instance, one time when she [Ellen] was supposed to get all the rooms stocked and cleaned, I was busy doing pharmacies, and she told me, "Don't worry about it, I'm going to do that right now, so you don't have to do it tomorrow." And then Marsha comes to me and says the next day, "Well, those rooms aren't . . ." Ellen went and told her . . . "Well, Katrina didn't get those rooms stocked like she should have." And I just, you know. . . . That happened a lot. She said she'd take care of something, and then Marsha found out or the doctors may have told her that something didn't get done, and it was never her [Ellen].

Katrina tried to rebut what she believed were unfair accusations, but she felt her supervisor would always accept Ellen's word against hers. In addition, at one point, Katrina was having babysitter problems—the sitter, who had two children of her own, wasn't always ready when Katrina arrived to pick her up—and Katrina was 15 minutes late for work two days in a row. Katrina asked another medical assistant if she would be willing to switch shifts so that she could come in a little later; the other medical assistant agreed, but Marsha refused to permit the change. Katrina also said that Marsha herself could have filled in for her when she was late.

Katrina became increasingly vocal in her complaints; and the end came after she had been working for a year: One day, Marsha complained of an oncoming migraine headache and announced that after having lunch with a friend, she was going home. Katrina said to Marsha, "Gee, we wish we were tired, we wish we could just go home, too"; Katrina was fired the next day. Marsha told her that the doctors were dissatisfied with her work. One day, however, when Katrina knew that Marsha would be away, she went to the office and talked to the doctors directly. They told her that they had no problems with her work and would be willing to give her a recommendation. Katrina believes she was fired because she spoke up: "I guess I was telling her how things were, and it didn't work out. . . . I guess you could say she expected things out of us she didn't expect out of herself, and I just didn't think it was right." Other members of her boyfriend's family consoled her about her job loss, telling her that they thought Marsha fired Katrina because she knew too much about Marsha's life that the office manager preferred to keep hidden.

Natalie, a husky young woman with a shy smile, enjoys working with her hands. After earning her GED, she attended a job-readiness class sponsored by the state employment service and was referred to a position as a maid in a motel because she had said she liked to clean house. Her prospective employer did not interview her: "He just said, 'I'll see you Wednesday.'" Natalie worked at the job two months: "I liked it, but I just could not get along with the guy that owned it [and who was her supervisor]." For one thing, Natalie (who herself has a strong regional accent) and the owner had difficulty communicating: "They were foreigners, and you couldn't really understand what they were saying to you, and then when I would look at them and say, 'Say it again,' they would look at us like we was crazy or something." Natalie also felt that the owner should have explained to her how he wanted things done: that is, how the bed should be made, or how many bars of soaps and rolls of toilet paper should be left in each room. Instead, he had another maid train her. Natalie, who has firm ideas of right and wrong, commented, "She was real good. But to me, it wasn't only her place, it was his."

Natalie also felt that the way the owner ran the place created needless problems for her. For example, because he did not provide enough clean sheets early in the day, the maids had to clean all the rooms and then go back to make the beds, an unnecessary and time-consuming procedure that Natalie worried would interfere with her ability to pick up her three children from daycare. He was also dilatory in filling out the welfare agency papers certifying her employment, causing friction between Natalie and her welfare worker.

Natalie says she did good work at the motel: it took her only 15 minutes to clean a room, a task that would take others 20 or 25 minutes. She was working between five and eight hours a day, usually five or six days a week, but sometimes seven days, and felt the motel owner was unsympathetic toward her responsibilities as a mother:

> He wanted me to work seven days a week, he couldn't understand that I had three small kids and I wasn't spending any time with them. He said, "Well, you got to learn how to control . . . or to handle a job and handle being a wife or whatever." I said, "It's like this, you know. Five or six days a week I can handle, but I don't think that I should have to work seven days a week."

An incident concerning her children caused her to quit work:

> They called me from the daycare one day and told me that my baby was sick. To me, my kids are more important to me than anything. I went and told him, "I need to leave." He asked me why, and I told him. I said, "Well, my kids are sick." And I stood there and argued with him for about an hour, 'cause he said, "Well, I got rooms that needs to be cleaned." And there was two other girls there. They both told me, "Natalie, go ahead and take off. We'll do what's supposed to be done." I said, "Okay, that's fine." Well, he didn't want it like that. He wanted all three of us working. I told him then, I said, "Well, it's like, my baby's sick, she's needing me, I got to go." Finally, I got him calmed down enough to understand that I could bring back a doctor's excuse. When I brought it in the next day, he wadded it up and . . . threw it back over the desk. He said, "I don't even want to hear it." I said, "Well, do you want me to work or not?" He said, "It's left up to you." I said, "I'll see you whenever. Bye." And I walked out. You know, it was wrong with me by not giving him a notice or anything, but it was wrong of him not to let me go tend to my kids.

Two of the other motel employees quit the same day she did.

Natalie had other reasons for quitting: "I wasn't getting enough hours in. . . . In the long run, after I sit down and thought about it, it was costing me more to work there than it was for me to just sit at home." The notation on the employment service referral paper had said that the job was from 9:00 to 5:00; instead, it turned out to have highly variable hours. Working part-time, Natalie lost almost all her Food Stamps and a good portion of her welfare check, and it cost her $4 a day in gas to get back and forth to the motel. Had she been able to work more hours a day (and fewer days a week), Natalie says she would have kept the job.

Financial concerns, while present, nonetheless seem secondary to the other factors governing Natalie's decision to quit. She said that she would take another job at the same wage ($5 an hour) if the supervisor were a nicer person, even if it would mean having her Food Stamps and welfare cut again. Indeed, she has expressed a strong desire to be off welfare:

> I'm going to get me a full-time job, because I don't want to draw Food Stamps any more, and I don't want to live off of welfare. I want to teach my kids how to be independent—how to take care of theirself. You know, it's hard. It's going to be hard for a while. But I can get adjusted to it.

How youth employment programs can assist participants in dealing with authority is considered in the last part of this chapter.

Work vs.Welfare: The Young Women's Attitudes

Employment was an alternative to welfare for some young women, like Dolores and Katrina; welfare supplemented the earnings of others, like Natalie.

Two respondents who were attending two-year colleges felt that their current skills and experience would not allow them to find jobs paying enough to make it worth their while to leave welfare, and determined to complete their training certificates before looking for work. A couple of other respondents who had been employed agreed with Natalie's conclusion that working didn't leave her better off economically. Claudia, for one, lived in a subsidized apartment whose rent varied with the tenant's income; when she was working, her rent shot up from $83 to $252, eating up a good part of her salary. Kelly also found that working did not benefit her financially:

> I've found now that I'm not on welfare and I'm working, it's hard . . .'cause I get nothing. Which is fine, 'cause, you know, I'm just happy supporting myself and my son now. But it's harder. . . . 'Cause when I was on welfare, I got $280 a month. My rent was $18. I had no daycare or nothing. I got Food Stamps. . . . But now my rent's up. [She receives a rent subsidy but still pays $204 a month.] I pay my child care. I don't get Food Stamps. I pay everything. It's harder.

Kelly's earnings brought her one dollar over the income limit to receive assistance with child care expenses, and she had to pay $266 a month for care for her four-year-old son. Nonetheless, when asked if there were times she would rather be on welfare, she replied firmly, "No."

But the majority of the respondents queried felt that employment did improve their economic position. This was true for several reasons. Most important, perhaps, most of the respondents had been employed for less than a year and continued to receive means-tested benefits such as Food Stamps and Medicaid; a number received supplemental welfare benefits as well. Moreover, they were able to find free or low-cost child care. And some had other sources of income—child support, for instance, or help from partners or family members. All these factors mitigated the financial consequences of exchanging welfare for work.

Aside from the economic benefits of working, many respondents—both young women who had been employed in the post-GED period and those who had not—recognized other advantages of having a job and being free of public assistance. Kelly and many others spoke of the psychological benefits: the feelings of independence they derived from working, the loss of self-esteem and the public opprobrium they experienced while they were on welfare. Some complained about the small amount of their welfare grants and the difficulty of stretching their checks to cover a month. And a number spoke of the "hassles" that accompanied welfare receipt, and of the "nosiness" of welfare workers and the "putdowns" and unfair treatment they had received at their hands. Mary, who was working and off welfare at the time of the interview, voiced the opinion of many when she said of welfare, "It's just too much hassle to go through for so little." And when asked about the advantages and disadvantages of being on welfare, she replied, "There's no advantages at all, no."

Most respondents, however, recognized certain advantages of being on aid. Erin talked about the dependability of the monthly grant, and its stability—always the same amount. (She had a part-time job with variable hours, so the amount of her paycheck differed from week to week.) Several students commented that AFDC enabled them to go to school without having to work at the same time. A number mentioned the income-tested benefits for which welfare recipients are eligible—in particular, Food Stamps and Medicaid. And Jessica, who was attending college, noted, "There's a lot more programs for people that are on AFDC." In fact, Mariah expressed willingness to forgo the welfare grant itself but recognized that the types of assistance she needed—free training, child care, and medical coverage—are linked to AFDC receipt.

Many young women said though they disliked receiving welfare, they felt that they had no choice in the matter. The attitude of Linda, a divorced mother of three, was fairly typical: "I hated the fact that I had to . . . people call it 'leeching on to the government.' I hate that label, 'leeching on.' I'm not a leech, you know, I need to do what I need to do." The respondents justified their own receipt of public assistance by viewing it as a temporary expedient to help them get where they wanted to be in life. As Linda remarked, "Yes, I'm on aid, but I'm on aid for a purpose. I'm not just sitting around and doing nothing with it, I'm doing something about it." Century echoed this sentiment: "It depends on how a person use it. I'm using it as a stepping-stone to get somewhere in life." And Julia commented:

> I don't feel bad because I'm on welfare, but I know that I can better myself. That's why I don't feel bad, because I know that I'm not going to be on welfare forever. You know, some people are like, "Hey, I can just sit around and get a check," you know. But that's not the way I want to be.

Indeed, many young women were quick to differentiate themselves from other people they knew who showed little inclination to get off the rolls, and from those who, as Alexis put it, were abusing welfare rather than using it. Gloria, for instance, spoke deprecatingly of a neighbor:

> I don't like it [welfare]. This lady that lives up next door over there, on that street, up the sidewalk—she's 32, and she has two kids, and she's on welfare. And I was like, "Why don't you go to school?" She told me she didn't want to. Just lazy. Both of her kids are in school—one's in sixth grade, and one just started kindergarten. All she does is stay home all day.

Patricia contrasted her use of welfare with that of several other young women she knew: "I think in my case, I've used the system well, with going to school, getting my own training. I don't think that I have misused it. But there are people I know that have kids every three years so that they don't have to go to school, and so that they can stay home." Patricia spoke of one her age: "We were born the same year, and she has two kids. One is six, and one is three. And she's pregnant with the third one. *Every three years.* So she doesn't have to go to school, and that's just the way she wants it." Patricia has determined to maintain a distinction between her own experiences and those of her acquaintance, in the face of objective similarities in their situations. At the time of the interview, Patricia had been out of school and training for a year, derailed in part by pregnancy. Her two children are spaced three years apart, and she thinks she might like to have a third child three years from now. Nonetheless, Patricia's insistence on a difference in motivation helps her to rationalize the circumstances in which she finds herself and to see them as temporary rather than permanent.

Young women were asked their opinion of training and work requirements for welfare recipients. The large majority favored such requirements (although a few set limits on who should be obligated to participate).[6] As Margaret put it, "You cannot sit back and draw off of other people for the rest of your life." Edna's response unites the two themes of the value of work requirements and the need to draw a distinction between deserving and undeserving recipients:

> I feel that people who are on the welfare, . . . you need to see for yourself that you need to do something for your own self and for your children. Because you can't be living off that. And I just don't feel that it's right, because a lot of people that are trying get judged for it, and the people who don't try, it's like they're the ones that are putting the bad name on the others.

One reason the respondents may have approved of work and training requirements (at least in theory) is that, for the most part, they preferred to go to school or work—although not necessarily full-time—rather than to stay at home. (This may, in fact, be an important characteristic distinguishing the young women discussed in this chapter, who received their GEDs, from the young women considered in Part III, who did not.) The young mothers were not unmindful of the stresses that having less time to spend with their children could create. But many complained that, after staying at home for a while, they grew bored, with little to do and little money to do it with. Mercedes, along with others, opined that her children were actually better off for her being out of the house:

> My personal feelings about that is I am a good influence on my children, because, you know, I'm *not* at home sitting on my lazy butt. I am going out, going to school, doing something. So my kids can *see* that I am doing something with myself. So they know that life isn't just sitting on your butt collecting

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[6] DeeDee, for instance, felt that the government should require young people to work, but not older people: "I mean, what do they expect them to do? They can't work. They too old to work." She takes her mother as a case in point: "She's 53—well, she's not *too* old to work . . . but uh-uh, I wouldn't want her to, like, go out and work, like in a office or nowhere. I don't think she would be able to handle it. . . . She be standing up for a while . . . and she got real bad back pains. You know, that's why I say I don't think she ought to do it, 'cause she had raised 13 kids and raised our grands. And now she do the housework, now she's volunteering for the food bank, I don't think she'll be able to work nowhere. She'll volunteer, like, if she can sit down, she'll do that."

> welfare. So now they see their mother going to school to better herself, and I think that is a positive outlook for my children.

Preparation for the Workplace: What the Findings Suggest

With only a few exceptions, the respondents in this study did not leave their jobs because of inability to perform the required tasks. Nor did most feel that it was not to their advantage, economic or otherwise, to work (although some may have felt that the pay they were receiving was not worth the hassles they endured). In fact, respondents' average reservation wage—$5.80 an hour—does not seem unrealistically high. Julia's statement about what being "well-off" would mean to her is especially poignant: "Well, as long as I could pay my rent, my bills, you know, and my food, and have that covered and still have at least two hundred extra dollars at the end of each month, then I'd be happy."

The difficulties of many young women in the workplace might rather be described as relational—dealing with supervisors, with fellow workers, with apparently arbitrary rules, and with favoritism and discrimination. These problems were rarely manifest at the outset; rather, they brewed and simmered, sometimes ending in an explosion that resulted in job loss. Since the issues—and emotions—tended to build over time, some of these explosions might have been averted if the respondents had had a way to defuse and resolve the conflicts early in their employment.

Some of the workplace issues that young mothers confront reflect a conflict of cultures and ethics. Katrina believed in a culture of egalitarianism in which supervisors and employees adhered to the same rules and could, in fact, perform interchangeable tasks: hence, her assertion that Marsha, her supervisor, could have (and presumably should have) filled in for her if she came in late. Natalie, expecting the motel owner to take a personal interest in the way she did her job, was upset when he asked another maid to train her instead of showing her what to do himself. In Natalie's case, too, a family-centered ethic came into conflict with a work-centered ethic; as she told her boss, "Well, it's like, my baby's sick, she's needing me, I got to go." Although Natalie's co-workers were willing to take on the work she was leaving undone, she appears not to have considered *how* they would do it. For Claudia, too, family needs came first: she could not conceive of being anywhere other than at her grandmother's bedside:

> It was like a serious situation, because my grandmother, she's *never* been in a hospital, never. And it was really shocking to the whole family. And I said they have to be crazy if they think I'm coming in. I was not going in. But she [her supervisor] never understood.

Programs like New Chance that seek to prepare young people for employment need to act as cultural interpreters: they must convey the norms, values, and customs of the workplace to those young women who have had limited exposure to the world of work. The aim is not to convince young women like Katrina, Natalie, and Claudia that their own values are wrong, but rather to help them recognize that employers are guided by different values and principles—division of labor, delegation of responsibility, performance monitoring, and strictly regulated absenteeism—and that they consider these essential for getting the work done. Such recognition could, at least, help young people to see that some of the things that happen in the workplace are neither directed against them personally nor intended to disparage their credibility or competence.

One way in which programs can help young people who have secured employment is to ensure that they maintain regular, sustained contact with program counselors or other "helping adults" who can put their experiences in some realistic perspective and show what is required of a worker.[7] Through ongoing contacts, such adults can help young people identify potential problems as they arise and think through a variety of options for dealing with them. Such meetings need not be time-consuming; but they should be frequent enough to ensure that problems do not escalate, and they should focus on specific problems. (A counselor's general question like "How's it going?" is all too likely to elicit an "Okay" or a "Fine," whereas a more pointed question like "Tell me what you like about your boss and what you don't like" is likely to get at underlying issues.)

Employability development or job-readiness classes can also be more effective in preparing young people beforehand for the demands of the workplace. Although many youth employment programs offer such classes, the stress is often on the skills and knowledge needed to get a job: how to draft a resume or complete an application, how to conduct oneself at an interview, how to "dress for success." The findings of this study suggest that much greater emphasis needs to be placed on the experiences young people are likely to encounter in work settings. Inviting program graduates who are employed to talk about the interpersonal environment of their workplace as well as about the work they do is one way of helping young people know what to expect; group discussions are another. Role-playing typical situations may be an especially effective technique because it require a participant to take the perspective of the other (i.e., the supervisor or a fellow employee) and to present convincingly points of view one may not oneself share. Role-playing can be used to inculcate, in an entertaining and nondidactic way, some important lessons: that others have legitimate interests that need to be taken into account; that neither party is usually wholly right or wrong.

The objective of follow-up counseling and employability development classes, it should be emphasized, is not to make young people blindly accept the conditions of the workplace and of supervisory authority. The preceding examples suggest that some of the respondents who got jobs were poorly supervised. There was no justification for the motel owner's wadding up the doctor's note Natalie brought in and throwing it at her; the fact that two of her fellow workers quit along with her suggests that he was mean-spirited and disliked by a number of his employees, not just by her. Katrina's supervisor may truly have resented the fact that Katrina was privy to information about her that she feared would be disclosed, especially as Katrina increasingly spoke her mind.

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[7] In New Chance, as noted earlier, case managers were expected to remain in touch with young women who became employed, but the press of growing caseloads often made such contacts relatively infrequent.

Nonetheless, Katrina should have known that her remark was likely to provoke the supervisor's anger and possible retaliation; during the interview, she gave no indication of any awareness that insubordinate behavior, especially in public, is generally unacceptable in a place of work. Natalie should have known that it was the motel owner's responsibility to see that she received training, but not necessarily to train her himself. Knowledge of workplace practices and norms allows young people to judge the behavior of others by more realistic standards, to better gauge the consequences of their own actions and words, and to negotiate for themselves more effectively. If, ultimately, a young woman decides to quit a job, that decision will then be the last—not the first—step in dealing with an untenable situation.

Although youth employment programs often fail to address directly prejudice and discriminatory practices, they should help participants prepare to handle this sensitive and potentially inflammatory issue. It is a disservice to participants to pretend that discrimination does not exist. Once again, the purpose of exposing young people to this issue is not to induce them to accept these practices as a fact of life—to "grin and bear it." Rather, it is to stimulate them to think about discrimination and its manifestations, to consider alternative responses to the various forms discrimination takes, and, if possible, to arrive at solutions that preserve both their integrity and their jobs. Again, if a young woman decides that a job is too injurious to her sense of self, that choice will be a considered one, not a spur-of-the-moment decision like Nina's.

Discrimination based on speech remains a lively issue. Programs like New Chance cannot be expected to change ingrained speech patterns within a short time. Nor would they want to require the use of standard English in the program setting; it is difficult to imagine how a program could create a comfortable environment for participants if they cannot talk naturally. But such programs can emphasize the use of standard English in role-plays and expose participants to role models who use standard English. And they can point out the advantages of being able to speak standard English, as well as of being able to switch easily between standard English and the vernacular.

Chapter 4

College: A Learning Experience

Twenty interview respondents entered college, generally as their first post-GED activity. All of the colleges they attended were two-year schools, and all but one were publicly funded community colleges. (The other was a private, proprietary college.)

Respondents vividly recalled the excitement they felt when they began:

> Nerissa: I just *knew* I was going to go through it. I was all ready to go—I had everything the teacher wanted us to have the first day of school, and if I didn't, that same day I asked, and I went right out and got it. I was very active and cooperative and got into the class discussions. . . . I was very outgoing, very excited. I was just ready to go.

> Patricia: I was ecstatic 'cause I never thought I would get to [name of college]. I never thought I would get to college at all. And so it was pretty cool being a college student. . . . You know, it was just real exciting to know that, yeah, I'm not that dumb after all.

Some were apprehensive as well:

> Elizabeth: Oh, I was nervous. You know, scared, and wondering what they expected, and it was weird. I was nervous, really nervous, 'cause I'm, like, God, man, I'm 23 years old, I'm coming to college. I'm thinking, to me, it's like, I'm late, I'm a late starter, and everybody's coming from high school already, and they know so much, and I don't really know nothing, you know—not too much, not what I should be knowing. But I was just nervous and excited at the same time.

> Letrice: Well, at first, when I first started, I felt kind of lost, you know, like I was just in Paris or something, and everybody is speaking French. But as time went on, I felt better.

Unfortunately, many of the interview respondents who attended college were like Sally, who got discouraged rather quickly:

> I was real enthusiastic. I was really into it, going to school, getting my books, getting my book bag. I mean, I just got up every morning, and I was glad just to go to school. But, after that, . . . I really got burned out real quick.

Thus, of the 20 young women ever in college, 13 had dropped out by the time they were interviewed, and seven of these 13 left school during or after their first semester, sometimes without having accumulated any credits at all.

This chapter examines why so many young women who started college optimistically ended by dropping out, as well as what happened to them subsequently, how their college experiences differed from those of the young women who remained enrolled, and the policy and programmatic implications of these differences.

College Dropouts

On average, the young women who dropped out of college had higher reading scores when they entered New Chance than did the young women who remained enrolled. (The dropouts read at the 10.1 grade level; the stayers, at the 9.5 grade level.) Thus, reading score alone cannot predict college success. Rather, the young women who dropped out of school did so for an assortment of reasons, which, although generally existing in combination and in interaction with each other, can be grouped into five basic categories: academic problems; feeling overwhelmed by the need to balance many responsibilities; the negative social environment of college; difficulties negotiating college procedures and regulations, and the financial consequences of misunderstanding these rules; and pregnancy.

Reasons for Dropping Out

Academic problems. Although a few of the young women found their college classes easy, the large majority did not. Most of the young women were unaccustomed to a heavy academic workload, which went far beyond their previous experiences in high school or New Chance. The views of Sally, the self-acknowledged burnout victim, were typical. She found college to be "a lot harder" than she had expected or than high school had been. When asked how college was harder, she replied:

> Learning three or four chapters in one night out of a book, and you probably learn half a chapter or less in high school, they have it more divided up, and in college you do a much more intense academic work in it. And plus writing essays, or even taking a quiz the next day, at least in high school, they gave you two or three days' notice, if you have to take a quiz on that chapter. One chapter, or maybe two, but I never thought you'd have three or four chapters to take a quiz all at once, and they called it a "quiz." [She laughed.]

Patricia, who attended college only for one semester, noted that there was no easing-in period as in high school or junior high; homework assignments hit right away:

> It's, "Okay, this is my name, this is our classroom number, this is the time. Are you supposed to be in here? No? Okay, leave. Yes? Okay, here, I want you to read this, this, this, and this. I want you to study the words on page 6, and I want you to give me an essay on it by Friday." And it's Thursday, you know. It's a lot faster.

New Chance graduates were often not well versed in study skills, such as note taking, that college students are expected to possess. Erin explained why college was different from what she had expected:

> When you have lectures, you have to take notes. You're constantly writing. . . . And like I say, when I went there and everything, they don't write nothing on the blackboard, you have to listen. That's all—you have to listen and take notes. . . . If you didn't catch it the first time, you have to at least have a friend in there, or have a tape recorder, or you won't get it.

Finally, the classes students were taking sometimes covered subjects to which they had never previously been exposed and which required a fair amount of abstract reasoning. Alexis, as noted in Chapter 2, lost interest in becoming a paralegal because she found the "fine lines" of the law too daunting. Even Patricia's "easy" classes could be hard:

> The easiest class I took was Reading 100. And all that class was supposed to do was to get your reading time up so that you could keep up with the rest of the class. And they suggested two books. And one I'd wanted to read, anyway, it really caught my attention, was *All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten*. That was a great book. And then *Of Mice and Men*—that was another great book. And it was funny, because we had these books, and I was done with the *Kindergarten* book within a week, because it got me going. And I'd read parts of it to Sam [her partner], and he would start laughing. And then we were reading *Of Mice and Men*—that was hard to get through. So we rented the movie. [She laughed.] I cheated—I watched the movie. 'Cause I . . . I was trying to get into the characters so I would know how they sounded. And I rented the tape and listened to it and said, "I cannot picture this big guy acting so stupid." [She laughed.] So I couldn't get through it, 'cause I kept laughing. And then I had a real deep conversation with my sister about it. That's one of her favorite books.

Patricia tried two different majors, finding both hard to master.

> I tried paralegal first, a week, didn't get it, didn't understand it. And then I tried medical terminology. And that was really tough, because the letters B-I, like "biopsy" and "biology," the letters B-I by themselves have about 12 different meanings, depending on if there's a line before it, after it, or under it. So you have to know if it's a suffix, prefix, or if it's the combined line word. And so it made it difficult, and depending on the sentence, you had to know which word it was and which part of the body it was. And it just confused me too much. I tried really hard in that, but by the time I was done with Chapters 1 and 2, they were on 12, and I just said I'm sinking too fast. And besides that, the doctor said, "No more." [She was in her eighth month of pregnancy.]

Feelings of academic inferiority could be exacerbated by awareness that other students were doing better, as Alexis noted:

> Another thing I didn't like about it [college] was, I didn't know this, but like in college, there's people in your classes who have been there a year or whatever, and then they're taking that course as you're just starting that semester, and I felt kind of intimidated. Because there was people who knew what they were talking about.

Although both Alexis and Patricia appear to have fairly low frustration thresholds, the problems they experienced were widespread.

Feeling overwhelmed. Juggling class attendance with parenting responsibilities and homework was a draining effort for a number of students. If time management was a special burden for single parents who lived alone (as the case study of Alexis demonstrates), meeting the demands of other adults was an added difficulty for students who lived with someone else. Edna's mother often complained that her daughter studied all the time; Patricia's boyfriend's parents, with whom the couple lived, were annoyed when she ate and studied in the bedroom instead of joining them for dinner.

Margaret was a gifted student with ambitions to become a physical therapist. Her community college career lasted only a couple of months. Margaret lived at home with her parents, and her mother was a reliable source of child care; she also had a trusted babysitter. As she explains it, her downfall was in attempting to combine a full course load with a job at a fast-food restaurant, working in the mornings on the days she had only one class and at night on the days she had three classes. Looking back, she reflects, "I could not handle that and the pressure of my kids. It was like I felt like I was being torn into so many little-bitty pieces." The last straw came when her two children, a boy and a girl, got sick:

> I had to miss so many days, 'cause at one point, he was sick, and I had to take him back and forth to the doctor, then like maybe a week or two later, then she came down with something, and then I had to take her back and forth to the doctor, and then I got sick, and I had to take time to go to the doctor. So that really messed me up.

Physically exhausted and mentally frazzled, Margaret dropped out of school and quit her job. She spent the next six months "being a mommy, just being with the kids and doing things with them, taking them places." Seeking to finance a move into her own apartment, she then resumed working at the restaurant, where she was promoted to shift manager.

Sally said that her mother (an RN and the only member of her family, besides a grandmother and one aunt, who encouraged her to continue her education[1]) urged her to go to college before she was ready for it and to attend on a full-time basis. Sally, on the other hand, thinks that young mothers would be well advised to go slow:

> I think that they should let them [students who are parents] take it at a slower pace. I don't know if that's being unfair or either categorizing that as someone going slower because they have kids or something like that, or family, who're going back to school. But I think it's kind of harder for them to try to juggle their classes plus their home life. And it's just a lot more difficult than any student who doesn't have any kids.

She speculated that she might not have dropped out if she had proceeded more slowly.

The college environment. If the respondents generally found college harder than high school, they often found it more impersonal as well. One reason attending college was stressful is that many of the dropouts made no friends or acquaintances while they were going to school. They had no one with whom to discuss assignments or share ideas, jokes, and gripes. Sally, for instance, commented, "I had, like, more associates, just saying 'Hi' to everyone in class, but I never did get close to anybody." Her explanation for this points both to her feeling of being pressured and to her sense that she had little in common with other students: "I just didn't have, really, the time of association of coming home, and plus, I have kids, and most of them don't, the ones that I know, and it was just too time-consuming." Erin, in contrast, had been warned by an aunt whom she respected, and who was attending the same college, that socializing could make for unpleasant situations and get in the way of her studies:

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[1] Of her other family members, Sally said, "Anybody else—my aunts and uncles—they were like, 'Oh, you're in college, okay.' 'Cause I guess they didn't go, and they just felt like, 'Well, she thinks she's better,' or whatever."

> Well, I kind of, like, stayed to myself, which my aunt told me—she's like, "Stay to yourselves," and everything. 'Cause kids over there can be crazy and stuff like that, you know. Especially the females act up. I just stayed to myself, didn't bother nobody, didn't want nobody to bother me or anything like that.

When asked what kids being "crazy" might mean, Erin explained:

> My aunt, she would tell me, like, all she does is, she could walk down the hall, and there'd be girls standing there with their boyfriends and stuff. They'll look at you all funny and stuff, like she was trying to look at their boyfriend or whatever, and it was nothing like that, you know. And then they'll cop an attitude, you know, stuff like that. And it was like my aunt said, she don't have time for that—she's there for one reason. That's to learn, to get out. You know, more education so she can just get out of there and make money. She says she doesn't have time for that silly stuff, is what she said. And she said, "Neither do you."

In short, while college can be a source of supportive peers and of friends who are also trying to make something of themselves, this was not part of the college experience of many of the dropouts.

Procedures, regulations, and finances. The young women who dropped out of school often seemed to have received little counseling about either standard operating procedures or what might be called the "commonsense rules" of student life. Their unfamiliarity with these norms sometimes made for difficulties. A student who was unaware of preregistration, for example, could find that a course in which she was particularly interested or that provided instruction at a suitable level was already fully subscribed. Or, if she had not given much thought to scheduling, she might find herself with an 8 A.M. class, a 2:30 P.M. class, and nothing in between—making it awkward for her to juggle her already limited time as student and mother.

Students who were feeling overburdened, or were having problems with their schoolwork or disliked a particular class, often dealt with the problem by dropping a course—a step that could endanger their presumptive or continuing eligibility for financial aid. For example, at one community college, students were eligible to receive a Pell Grant (a major source of federal financial assistance for disadvantaged college students) only if they were enrolled for six credit-hours; courses at the college offered between one and eight credit-hours depending on a course's type and level (with lower-level, "developmental" courses offering fewer credits).[2] If a student dropped below that level, she would lose her eligibility for the grant and would become eligible again only by making up the missing credits at her own expense. And if she dropped a course after a given deadline but before her eligibility for financial aid had been fully certified (which usually meant before the paperwork in her file was complete), she was responsible for the full tuition load for the semester. While the community college tuition fees were relatively low compared with other post-secondary institutions, they were more than a young mother stretching a welfare grant could afford.

Colleges have adopted policies such as these for understandable reasons. They do not want grant money to be expended on young women who are not serious about their studies. Nor do they want to lose tuition revenues—someone must pay, whether government or individual student. The point is that the young women interviewed were not aware of the rules—e.g., about when they could drop a course with impunity—and their lack of knowledge was costly. When Margaret, Letrice, and Lynn (whose case study follows) left college, each owed the institution several hundred dollars. Essentially, the young women had just one chance to get it right, and when they muffed that chance, they had to pay.[3]

Many of the young women spoke warmly of their college counselors; some did not. But the counseling the young women received, while perhaps sufficient for other students, often did not appear to have been enough for the New Chance graduates, who needed additional information on subjects ranging from the contents of specific courses to the fine points of rules. For one thing, the young mothers generally had few, if any, friends or relatives who had gone to college and could provide informal advice about negotiating this new environment. (Erin, whose aunt was a highly active mentor and guide, was very much an exception in this regard.)

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[2] Each college establishes its own criteria concerning the progress a student must make to continue receiving a Pell Grant. This college has now changed its rules to allow students carrying fewer credit-hours to receive a grant.

[3] The experience of Anita, who dropped out of training after she was accused of cheating and then enrolled in a proprietary college, offers an important insight into the financial problems young women encountered. While some proprietary colleges (including one attended by several of the study respondents) offer high-quality instruction and assist graduates in finding jobs, others—like Anita's—are notorious for extracting exorbitant tuition fees from students or for providing them with loans on which they are almost certain to default. Both Anita and Alexis (who had attended the same institution before joining New Chance) believed that their unpaid loans would bar them from admission to other training programs.

Several other young women at this site were tempted at one point or another to enroll in this college. The program coordinator at that site noted that while participants were in the first phase of New Chance, they were informed of the nefarious practices of this institution. Such cautions may have been insufficiently heeded because they came at a point when enrollees were not yet focused on their post-GED course of action. Repeated warnings about how such institutions operate, delivered both before and after students receive their GEDs—or their high school diplomas, for that matter—may be needed to prevent vulnerable young people from responding to the blandishments of exploitative private colleges.

For another, the consequences of making a mistake were, again, especially serious for young women whose economic and other resources were limited.

Pregnancy. Eight of the 13 young women who dropped out were pregnant at the time they were attending college. (The majority of these pregnancies began before the young women enrolled in college.) While the phenomenon of post-GED pregnancies is discussed in greater detail in the next chapter, it significantly affected these young women in two ways.

First, pregnancy exacerbated the other difficulties associated with college attendance. Some young women complained of being exhausted and lacking the energy required for a routine that included studying into the night. Thus, when Patricia was close to term, her doctor told her she could no longer make the twelve-mile trip to the college she was attending.

Second, an impending birth further justified the decision to drop out if a young woman had found college disappointing. Patricia, for one, claimed that had it not been for her pregnancy, she would have remained enrolled: "If I wasn't pregnant, I think I would have stayed and struggled and kicked and screamed all the way down until somebody kicked me out. You know, just to say I tried." Nonetheless, like most of the other young women who dropped out of college, Patricia has no concrete plans about when (or even, in her case, whether) she will return to school or what will enable her to do better the second time than she did the first. For Patricia and other young women, the birth of another child was an opportunity to revert to a more familiar pattern of activity when a less familiar one turned out to be too unsettling.

A Case Study of a Dropout: Lynn

While reasons for leaving school are analytically separable, they were often intertwined in practice. Except for pregnancy (she had a tubal ligation after the birth of her second child), these multiple and interacting explanations are embodied and exemplified by the brief college career of Lynn, who left after one term.

Lynn, who had long wanted to become an architect and declared that as her major when she enrolled in community college, describes herself as the "guinea pig" whose experiences taught New Chance staff and students about the realities of college life. Asked how much New Chance personnel had talked with her beforehand about what college would be like, she replied:

> They really didn't know too much, to tell us what to be aware of. 'Cause I mean, they just explained that it's a nice school, you'll learn a lot. And, if you have a problem, where to go. 'Cause see, they were shocked just as much as I was, 'cause I was telling them what was happening. They said, "I'm glad you told us, 'cause we didn't know that was that and this was that." 'Cause when I come back, I would tell them, and they would be shocked to find out. She [her New Chance case manager] said, "Well, now we know, now we can warn other girls if this is what's to happen to them."

Lynn's statement, "If they would have explained a lot of stuff to me, you know, I wouldn't have made a lot of mistakes," was well justified. For example, because no one told her about early registration, she was placed in a class that was too advanced for her:

> Well, my animal biology, that class was *very* hard. 'Cause, first of all, I never had animal biology. . . . See, it's important to have *early* registration. 'Cause if not, then you're going to have to take whatever is left. And the low biology class, there was nothing empty, and I had to take what was left. Which they stuck me in Biology 104, which I didn't know *anything* about. I didn't know anything about *animals*, you know, and the birds, and I . . . I mean, I was lost. After I started reading my notes and was picking up a little bit, I think I passed with a D. Which, that was disappointing. 'Cause, first of all, I didn't know anything about the class, and I was struggling to survive. I said, "I don't want to go through that no more."

No one at the college told her, either, that the architecture class for which she signed up was also too advanced:

> And when I got in the class, that was the advanced class, 'cause they just started doing blueprint. I said, "I don't know anything about no blueprint." You know, they didn't explain none of the tools that we used. So I was kind of lost there for a minute. But after I talked to the teacher for a while, she was patient with me. 'Cause everybody else was working, and I spent most of my time erasing stuff off my paper.

Finally, no one told her that by dropping out of classes that were too difficult for her, she had lost her eligibility for a Pell Grant. She prepared to register early for a second term, only to find that she would no longer receive tuition assistance. (Even before losing her grant, Lynn had financial problems: because her grant money didn't come on time, she was unable to purchase books with the rest of her classmates and fell behind in her studies. Eventually, she got a loan from New Chance to purchase books and supplies and repaid it when the grant money finally arrived.)

Many other problems arose during Lynn's stay in college. One of these was transportation: she lived in a low-income housing development on the far outskirts of the city and did not have a car. A second was finding the time to study: by the time she had gotten home, cleaned up, fixed dinner for her children and herself, bathed them, and gotten them to bed, it was often 9 P.M., and she was too tired to hit the books. Lynn also notes that she was uncomfortable with most of her classmates, feeling that she didn't fit in. The only people with whom she felt at ease were her friends from New Chance—but: "We was just having problems left and right. Made us all want to quit, and most of 'em did." A final hardship was the highly distressing suicide of a cousin with whom she had grown up:

> He killed hisself a couple of weeks before his birthday. He would have been twenty. He would have been twenty, and he killed hisself. Which, I don't know . . . I didn't understand why. But then I just started havin' nightmares about it and couldn't go to sleep. . . . Then I started missing school. You know, just didn't want to go to class.

Given these outside obstacles, there is no assurance that Lynn would have fared better even with adequate academic counseling. On the other hand, if she had been enrolled in classes that were less demanding, she might not have had to drop them and then dropped out of college altogether. And had she felt more self-confident academically, she might have felt more comfortable socially as well.

After leaving college, Lynn stayed home for several months. Finally, a neighbor helped her get a part-time job in the kitchen of a nursing home, where she had been working for three months at the time of the interview. But she talks of returning to school, although her plans for when and how she will do so are hazy at this juncture. And she still clings to her longtime dream of becoming an architect.

Subsequent Activities of College Dropouts

The experience of Patricia and Alexis, who essentially stayed at home after leaving college and did little to enhance their self-sufficiency, was atypical. Six of the 13 young women who left school subsequently got a job (like Lynn), one entered vocational training (Mercedes, who "turned her life around," as described in Chapter 2), and two did both.

Since many of the young women spent little time in college, it is not surprising that this minimal investment in postsecondary education appears to have netted them nothing in the way of income gains. The wages they could command were generally no higher than those of women who had not attended college at all.

Two of the three students who entered short-term training programs after leaving college were successful there. In the third case, it was too early to determine whether the young woman would do better in a nine-month program than she had in a two-year program.

The Students Who Stayed Enrolled

The college experiences of students who were still in college at the time of the interview resembled those of dropouts in some ways but differed in other, perhaps critical, ones.

Members of both groups, for example, confronted similar academic difficulties. They were likely to find the workload demanding, to drop classes in which they were doing poorly, and to have to repeat classes they had failed. For this reason, many of those still enrolled were one or more semesters behind schedule in their efforts to get a training certificate, and a process that should have taken two years was likely to take three.[4] Both dropouts and stayers were also stressed by the pressures of going to school and raising a family, although as a group the stayers were more fortunate in this regard because they were more likely to be living with their mothers or other family members; they generally shared in the household chores but were not expected to take on the entire burden of managing a household. The fact that, in sharp contrast to the dropouts, none of the stayers had a repeat pregnancy suggests that they may have been generally more motivated to move ahead: seeing another child as an impediment to progress, they took care to use contraception faithfully.

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[4] In this respect, the experiences of the New Chance students may be similar to those of other welfare recipients attending college through the JOBS program. A JOBS employment counselor in New Mexico, for example, noted that it took JOBS participants at a local community college 18 to 24 months to finish a one-year program and that the pace might be even slower for those in two-year programs (see *Employment & Training Reporter*, 1993).

Four facts are particularly striking about the seven stayers: all came from the same New Chance site; six of them were enrolled in the same community college; four of these had completed at least three semesters (Edna was one of these) and seemed well on the way to finishing their programs successfully; and only one of the dropouts had attended this college—Julia, whose daughter became very ill during the first week of classes. Thus, the context of a young mother's life clearly had factors that facilitated continued attendance.

One such factor was a particular state's welfare policy: the state JOBS program paid for the young women's tuition in this community college, so they did not have to rely on Pell Grants or other forms of financial aid and thus avoided the red tape, delays, and other problems associated with receipt of federal grant monies.

In addition, two elements of the particular college setting appear particularly significant: a sympathetic counselor/welfare agency liaison; and friendships and social supports, promoted in part by campus organizations and activities. The counselor at the college who was responsible for those students enrolled in the state's welfare-to-work program (including the New Chance graduates) not only certified their attendance and progress but also provided ongoing assistance to the young women in many ways. Marie recalls her initial confusion and how the counselor helped set her straight on what classes to take:

> I didn't know how to go about it. I didn't know we had a [JOBS program] liaison on campus. So I had went and registered all by myself, and I found out that I had taken all the wrong classes. Registered for all the wrong classes. So [the program] helped me get all the right classes and everything, so I got pretty lucky.

Linda, the mother of three, remembers the counselor's willingness to confer with her at length about her experiences and the problems she was confronting:

> The first semester, we were there like every day, "Hi, how you doing?" you know, "I'm still hanging along." She was like my New Chance case manager, she's really helpful. She was really helpful—if we [had] any problems, or if we had needed someone to talk to. One year, one semester, I went to her, just to talk to her, and she helped me out. We sat there for like two hours, just talking about my problems and school and stress and this and that. It was great, and we get along really good.

Perhaps most important, the counselor appears to have held flexible views about what constituted sufficient academic progress, so that the state JOBS program continued to pay the tuition even if a young woman had to drop or retake several courses. According to the respondents, while she urged them to get through their courses and receive their certificate as quickly as possible, she also advised them to withdraw from a class rather than get an F or a D that would bring down their grade-point average.

For these respondents, college was a pleasant and sociable environment. For one thing, a small contingent of former New Chance students enrolled together, took many of the same classes together, studied together, and generally supported each other's progress. The young women also made new friends. One condition for enrolling their children in the college's daycare center was that they had to volunteer there a certain number of hours a week and attend regular parenting sessions; the daycare center thus provided an opportunity to meet other young mothers. The college had special programs for economically disadvantaged and minority students; and these, too, provided a social context supportive of academic achievement.

The records of the young women who remained enrolled in college suggest not only that motivation matters, but also that it needs to be reinforced by the experience of success; and that the likelihood of success, in turn, is strengthened by good counseling and by the establishment of supportive peer groups. Nonetheless, some failure must be anticipated. The New Chance graduates' lack of academic preparation and the multiple responsibilities they faced made it virtually inevitable that they would have to withdraw from and repeat some of their classes. Had they had to finance these courses on their own, as young women did in other states, it is likely that more would have dropped out. Since their success is, of course, the ultimate goal, the wise course may be not to penalize failure harshly.

College: Some Concluding Reflections

The rationale for permitting AFDC recipients to attend college is that there they will acquire the skills they need to obtain jobs that will enable them not only to get off welfare but also afford them a modicum of economic security. Yet the experiences of the respondents in this sample suggest that without additional assistance that includes help with academics, more and better counseling, and social supports, many young welfare mothers who enroll in college will not get far.

The difficulties that many young women faced in the academic arena suggest that earning a GED may not by itself constitute adequate preparation for college. Since the college attenders interviewed had been, on average, out of high school for 28 months before they started New Chance, they had gotten out of the routine of doing regular homework assignments, preparing for quizzes, and so on. (Of course, some of the young women were doing poorly in high school even before they dropped out.) Students in GED classes typically do not have long homework assignments, they are not expected to read lengthy texts, whether fiction or nonfiction, and they do not have to write research papers. They do not need to acquire the skills essential for success in college: listening carefully, being able to pick out the main points of a lecture, taking notes, using a library.

This does not mean that GED programs should be adapted to meet the needs of those program graduates who go on to college. GED programs serve students with a variety of needs and goals, among which college entry is only one.[5] But the difficulties experienced by the respondents suggest that pre-college study skills courses might help students make the transition to college more easily.[6]

If such assistance and other supports are unavailable, one possible course is for programs like New Chance to be much more selective about which students they encourage to attend college, recommending it as an option for the most academically gifted and motivated. There was little reason, for example, to expect college success of Nerissa, who struggled academically throughout her stay in New Chance (she herself commented, "When it comes to studying, I'm not a very bright person to studying") and not only had two young children but was pregnant with a third.

For students who are less academically able, or who may lack the supports or the stamina needed to complete a two-year college program, a relatively short-term vocational training programs lasting from three months to a year may be a better option. Fourteen study respondents entered such training courses, usually as their first post-GED activity, but sometimes after having dropped out of college or worked; three of them were still in training at the time of the interview. The majority of the respondents reported that their experience in training was positive: they liked their classes and were able to complete the programs successfully.[7] Of the seven who had graduated from training and subsequently secured employment (one recent graduate was looking for work at the time of the interview), five found jobs in the clerical and medical assistant fields for which they had been trained. These jobs, moreover, paid somewhat higher wages than those obtained by the young women who dropped out of college and earned no postsecondary credentials. The New Chance program director at Nerissa's site, who was initially a strong advocate of college attendance, now sees the importance of exploring shorter-term training options.

Another course is to permit a wide cross-section of students to attend college and to fail the first time around, if they are able to learn from their mistakes and to retain their self-esteem. Nerissa had a dream—to become a child psychologist; and however improbable it was, program staff did not want to deny her the chance to realize it. Although Nerissa no longer believes that becoming a child psychologist is a goal to which she should aspire in the short term, she wants to return to college when all three of her children are in school and she has more time for studying. Indeed, almost all the young women who dropped out of college hope to return at some point, although none appears to have set a specific, immovable date for re-enrolling.[8] Undisillusioned by their own experience, they continue to subscribe to the American creed that a college education is the gateway to success.

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[5] According to a 1989 survey, 43 percent of female GED candidates reported that they took the test primarily in order to meet the requirement for admission to an educational institution, 30 percent of the women cited employment goals as their main reason for taking the test, 25 percent took it for their personal satisfaction, and 12 percent did so for other reasons (see Hayes and Baldwin, 1993).

Mothers who are school dropouts of high school age and who are considering attending college might be advised to return to high school rather than a GED program, although this would not have been feasible for many New Chance enrollees, who were beyond the age of most high school students.

[6] Although many respondents were, in fact, enrolled in study skills courses during their first semester, they were also taking several other classes in at least one of which they were likely to be floundering.

[7] The three young women who dropped out of training programs did so for different reasons. As noted in Chapter 2, Anita left because of a bitter dispute with her instructor. Marie, who does not speak Spanish, was uncomfortable with her instructor, an ardent Chicana nationalist; in addition, many of her friends were attending the community college that Marie subsequently chose to attend. Mariah liked her training program very much but left for other reasons, detailed in the following chapter.

Yet both time and public funds are wasted, and self-esteem is imperiled, when welfare mothers enter college but make little academic headway. It may, therefore, be worthwhile to implement relatively low-cost measures—such as additional counseling and funding for peer support groups—that have the potential to increase students' prospects for success their first time around.

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[8] One exception was Erin, who, after dropping out of a pre-RN program, was seriously considering a one-year LPN program offered by a vocational school; an LPN, she said, is "right up there under an RN."

Chapter 5

Family Matters

Two events in the study subjects' personal lives had the power to disrupt progress toward self-sufficiency, sometimes briefly, sometimes for a significantly longer period: an unplanned pregnancy—and virtually all the post-GED pregnancies were unplanned; and what might be termed "personal and family crises," or situations that profoundly disturbed whatever order existed in the young women's lives. The respondents' experiences in both areas point to the vital importance of skilled, sensitive counseling and assistance.

Pregnancy and Childbearing

New Chance, in common with most other programs for young mothers, seeks to help participants control their fertility, so that they will postpone having additional children until they are better able to afford them. But curtailing subsequent pregnancy and childbearing has proved one of the most difficult challenges these programs have faced.[1] The experience of the study respondents suggests that New Chance may not be exceptional in this regard.

Nineteen of the 34 young women were pregnant during the post-GED period. Eleven of these pregnancies resulted in a live birth. (This does not include Mercedes's baby, who, as noted in Chapter 2, died a few hours after being born; it does include Julia's child, whom she gave up for an open adoption.) Three young women had voluntary abortions, two required therapeutic abortions, and two young women miscarried. Thus, 16 of the 34 young women had pregnancies that they had intended to carry to term.

Only one of the respondents said that her pregnancy was planned. Anita wasn't using any form of birth control when she became pregnant again. Her boyfriend, Carl, was also the father of her first child, and she expected that they would stay together. Asked if she thought that a pregnancy would put some of her other plans on hold, she said, "No. I didn't think it would interfere at all, and it didn't." In fact, Anita continued to go to classes at the proprietary college she was attending until she was in her eighth month. She planned to re-enroll on schedule when the baby was three months old, and to take courses at night while Carl watched the children. But the college told her that her student loan was in default; and shortly thereafter, she and Carl broke up. For the first six months after the baby was born, Anita wanted to stay home with her new daughter; now she feels ready to get a job, but first needs to find a babysitter.

The other young women were surprised to learn that they were pregnant, and the majority were at least somewhat upset. Nonetheless, most of them continued their pregnancy, even if they did not particularly want a new baby. Two of the three young women who acknowledged having had an abortion were experiencing extreme personal difficulties when they became pregnant, and felt that it would be wrong to have a child at that time. Some young women (Alexis among them) considered abortion but decided they could not go through with it. A number rejected abortion on ethical grounds; one expressed fear of the medical consequences; and a few seemed either mindful of the wishes of parents or partners who wanted them to go to term, or defiant of the wishes of others who wanted them to terminate the pregnancy.

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[1] A useful review of the limited effectiveness of programs for young mothers in this area concludes either that programs were ineffective in reducing new pregnancies, or that any positive results were based on small samples or methodologically questionable procedures (see National Research Council, 1987).

Some young women saw continuing a pregnancy as a matter of taking responsibility for their behavior, a means of rectifying a mistake. As Patricia, who went to term, put it: "No, we didn't plan on it. But it happened. And we decided we're not going to be one of these people that uses abortion as a means of birth control. I got pregnant, okay, now let's take responsibility for it. Let's do right." One young woman who ultimately miscarried said:

> I did not want another child. But it was too late to do anything about it. And I just, . . . I figured I got myself into that mess, I would work through it, just like I did with my older one. . . . I guess it [the miscarriage] worked out for the best, because I couldn't handle the two kids on my own. It'd be really hard.

There was also a fatalistic element in some decisions to go to term. This was expressly articulated by one young woman who became pregnant because one day she forgot to take a pill:

> I skipped one, but you can take it the next day with the other one. And I guess that's where it just messed the whole schedule or however the pills worked, messed it up, 'cause I didn't understand. I just thought, oh, well, it must be how . . . I must be meant to have a baby.

Acknowledging that she had often forgotten to take a pill and then taken two together, she added: "That's why I said, I don't understand why—you know, how—that happened, 'cause I've done that lots of times. Skip a pill and take it. But that's why I said, it must have been meant for me to be pregnant. So, meant for the baby to be here." Even though she knew, at a cognitive level, that she became pregnant because she hadn't understood how to use the pill correctly, she still seemed to think that because she had made the same mistake "lots of times" before without getting "caught," this time it was "meant" for her to have a baby.

Other study subjects also acknowledged that they had become pregnant because they did not understand how the pill worked (recall Alexis's belief in Chapter 2 that it would take "a month, or whatever, for everything to be out of your system") or because they had used it wrong. Erin, asked why she now uses Norplant after having had a second child, replied: "For the simple fact is, I'm no good in pill-taking." Three of the 19 young women who became pregnant, however, insisted that they had been using the pill faithfully and correctly. Since it is unlikely that correct, consistent use of the pill resulted in a 16 percent pregnancy rate, a more plausible explanation is that these three forgot about seemingly small lapses (e.g., skipping the pill for a day) or were unable to acknowledge the fact that such minor slips could have such major consequences.[2]

It is particularly striking that the large majority of these pregnancies occurred when the young women were either experiencing disruptions in other areas of their lives or about to undertake a major transition. These disruptions could be happy events (Nina, for example, became pregnant when her husband returned from the Gulf War), but more often were not. Alexis and Mercedes, for instance, became pregnant when they were having difficulty at community college, and dropped out of school shortly thereafter; Anita became pregnant right after she abruptly quit her training program. One possible explanation for these pregnancies is that such crises in the young mothers' lives diminished their sense of personal efficacy and ability to control their destiny, and thus their motivation to use contraception effectively. A crisis can also disrupt one's daily routines, including regular birth control.

Other respondents, like Patricia and Sally, became pregnant around the time they were due to leave the on-site phase of New Chance or to start community college. Periods of transition can lead to progress and regression, sometimes both at once. Having another child made it possible for these young women to reaffirm their comfortable and generally gratifying roles as mothers at the same time that they took on a new identity—that of college student—that promised to be exciting but also stressful.[3]

At the time of the interview, the respondents as a group were divided about whether they wanted to have more children. Some were sure they did not. Mary, for instance, was prompted by economic considerations to stop at two: "If I had, like, three or four kids, I wouldn't be able to spoil them all. You know, somebody would be neglected. Two is enough. Two—you could spoil two easily, I think." Nina and Sally were also satisfied with two, especially since each had a boy and a girl. Mercedes did not want additional children to hamper her progress—or her lifestyle: "I don't want no more kids, for one, because I don't want to be having my career going very well and then get pregnant and have to stop my career because I got pregnant. And plus, by then my children will be older. And I don't want to take care of a baby any more."

Other respondents said that they would like more children eventually. But "eventually" generally came with conditions attached: the young women wanted to be financially independent, or married, or both. Jessica said simply, "The next child I have, I want to be able to provide and give him what he really needs." Elizabeth would like two more children along with the two she already has; she feels it would be right fo have the next one "after I'm stable in my job, and I have everything situated, and I'm financially well off."

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[2] Douglas J. Besharov (1993) cogently observes that because the modern contraceptive pill contains much lower dosages of estrogen than the pill used in the 1960s and 1970s (thereby reducing its negative side effects), it also requires much more precise use: "Missing just one pill puts a woman at risk of pregnancy. Missing more is an invitation to pregnancy."

[3] This behavior pattern, of course, may not be unique to disadvantaged young mothers.

And Marie voiced the ambivalence of still others about whether to have more children: "Sometimes I do and sometimes I don't. I don't think I would be ready for one. My son's enough as it is. But I don't . . . one day I will, and one day I don't."

All but a couple of study subjects agreed, however, that they did not want another child soon. Asked how she would feel if she were to get pregnant, Elizabeth summed up the feelings of many others:

> Ugh, goodness. It would be the wrong time. Would be the wrong time. It wouldn't be the right time. [She laughed.] That's why I've got to be really careful. I have enough with my two kids. They're fine. And they're happy, and I'm happy, and it would just be . . . I would hit a brick wall right now, if I were to get pregnant . . . It would just . . . it would probably mess up everything that I'm striving to do right now. It would put my life in hold again. And I wouldn't want . . . I can't have that right now.

All but one of the sexually active young women queried were using some form of contraception, and use of birth control by women who had experienced a post-GED pregnancy appeared to be more conscientious than in the past. In fact, ten of the young women had chosen a permanent form of contraception: eight women had had or were scheduled for a tubal ligation, while the partners of the other two had had or were soon to have a vasectomy. Moreover, four young women had opted for the Norplant contraceptive implant, which is effective for several years. The pill was the contraceptive method most frequently used by the remaining women; a number also used condoms, alone or in conjunction with another method.

Only one young woman was not using birth control of any kind at the time of the interview. She had already had one post-GED pregnancy that resulted in a therapeutic abortion, because she "can't take the pill" and her partner at that time, the father of her children, didn't want to use condoms. That man is now in prison; her new boyfriend and she also don't use contraception. When asked what would happen now if she were to get pregnant, she laughed:

> I don't know. I mean, he wants a baby bad, you know, 'cause, like, he always say all his friends got kids and he don't. I told him, I said, "I got two, so you got two. I mean, you want to help take care of mine, you could help." But he want more, but I ain't really ready for it. I want another one at least when my kids turn five.

That date was two years away, and she explained why she was not using some kind of protection at the time:

> I mean, I can't take the pill, and he don't like using protection, so what am I going to . . . ? Then, that Norplant that they give you—that don't work. 'Cause I have a friend. When the Norplants first came out, she got one. Now this was like last year, almost two years ago, she got one. She's pregnant, she's due in April, and she still got a Norplant in her arm. So I say, I ain't going to waste my time getting one if they don't work.

This statement as well as other details in the interview point to several factors underlying this young woman's failure to use birth control. First is her contraceptive ignorance: she was convinced that Norplant doesn't work, and her query, "so what am I going to . . . ?" suggests that she knew little about such over-the-counter methods as foam or the contraceptive sponge. Second is the fact that her boyfriend was pressuring her to have a child by him. Her own motivation to resist such pressure was also weak. At the time of the interview, she was unemployed and had no clear career goals. Finally, she did not believe that a new baby would interfere with her life plans. Had she been able to continue her previous pregnancy, she feels there would have been someone to care for the new infant.

> Like my friends—they love newborn babies, and they would have loved them, and they would have kept them, you know. Then I have, like, nieces, they old enough to babysit, too. Like, you know, they would be able to babysit for me. So I don't think one more child would have interfered.

Ashley, in contrast, knew from her own experience that having more children could present more child care problems:

> See, I didn't get on welfare until after my second son was born, 'cause me and Tom worked. 'Cause we only had one baby, and that was the new baby. All the rest of the grandkids was older, and everybody used to fight over babysitting him. But then when two started coming around, you know [laughing], it seemed like everybody minded their own business.

Claudia's case illustrates the way a new pregnancy could turn around progress toward self-sufficiency. She enrolled in New Chance when she was 19 and her son was three. After completing her GED, she entered a 14-week clerical training program that she liked very much. Upon graduation, she could only get a job working for a temporary personnel agency, but the New Chance job developer then found her a position as a receptionist for a family-owned business. She started off making $5 an hour, while continuing to receive a supplemental welfare grant and Food Stamps. Her welfare grant ended when she got a raise to $5.50. And by the time she left, she was making $6.50 and was receiving neither welfare nor Food Stamps. (She retained Medicaid for her son but was herself covered by the company's insurance plan.)

At first, Claudia recalled in glowing terms the things she liked about her job: her own desk; her own phone and computer; the friendliness of the customers and of the firm's employees, of whom she was the youngest: "They were nice. I got along with everyone at the job. It was no problem with no one. It was real nice." But as the interview unfolded, it became clear that not everything was so nice. Claudia felt her supervisor was strict, quick to complain if she turned in even one thing late. She also felt the supervisor would take another young woman's side before her own in a dispute. She was annoyed that one day when she had a bad cold and could be heard sniffing and sneezing on the intercom, no one told her to go home (although she acknowledges that she never asked, fearing her request might be denied). And she resented her supervisor's unsympathetic attitude when Claudia wanted to take a day off to attend her boyfriend's uncle's funeral.

Claudia became pregnant after she had been working for about nine months. She did not want to terminate the pregnancy because she was afraid she would develop uterine blood clots (although she never consulted a physician about this), because she feared she would feel guilty, and because her family was opposed to abortion. In deciding to continue the pregnancy, she was also making a decision to leave her job, both because the pregnancy was a difficult one and because she wanted to stay at home with her newborn child:

> Well, I knew when I was pregnant that I wasn't going to last, because I was having problems with the pregnancy. [In fact, she was on bed rest for three weeks at the end to avoid a premature delivery.] I was constantly in and out of the hospital. . . . And I knew I wouldn't have last at work, sitting. . . . Me, I get real frustrated easy. And I would have been real frustrated at work, trying to work, and I wouldn't have been able to do it. And I knew that I wouldn't go back because . . . I wanted to keep him while he was little. I didn't want him to be in a daycare or nothing.

The end came when Claudia's supervisor reprimanded her for taking a day off to see her grandmother in the hospital (see Chapter 3). The two women got into a big argument: "And that's when I told her, I was like, 'Well, you can fire me if . . .' 'cause I was like, 'I'll leave, or whatever.' And she was like, 'Well, if that's how you feel, if you want to go, you can go.' So I just left."

At the time of the interview, Claudia was back on welfare, at home with her seven-month-old son. It was not a good period in her life. Asked how she liked staying home, she replied "I hate it. It is so boring to look at the walls and everything every day. It was so boring—it is, for real. I can't wait till he's one [when she will feel free to return to work]." Claudia's mother helped her with her first baby, but now her mother is back at work, and Claudia is solely responsible for caring for her son.

Given her workplace difficulties, it is unclear whether Claudia would have remained employed had she not gotten pregnant, or at least whether she would have remained at the same job. "My mind was where I was quitting, anyway. I was fed up anyway for them getting on my back." But her pregnancy gave her no incentive to work things out with her supervisor. Instead, it ensured that she would leave work, and that it would be over a year before she would be ready even to look for another job.

Despite Claudia's case, having another child did not necessarily launch these young women on a downward trajectory (witness Jodie's example in Chapter 2), nor did it decrease their probability of self-sufficiency: virtually identical proportions of respondents who had a baby after receiving their GEDs (27 percent) and those who did not (26 percent) were off welfare at the time of the interview. Two interrelated considerations help to explain this unexpected finding. First, the sample is small and may not be representative of other New Chance enrollees in this regard. Second, many forces shaped the respondents' behavior, and the effect of any single variable, such as a new baby, is hard to identify. However, additional children almost invariably derailed the young women's progress, sometimes for only a few months but sometimes for much longer. Moreover, given the up-and-down nature of these young women's lives, repeated childbearing is likely to interfere with their chances of self-sufficiency in the long run, by requiring additional child care and further draining household budgets. Thus, programs for young mothers do well to emphasize delay of subsequent childbearing.

The experience of the 34 respondents suggests three important ways in which programs can strengthen the effectiveness of their family planning message. First, many young women, despite exposure to presentations on the various contraceptive methods, did not thoroughly understand their effectiveness or how to use them correctly; they held many misconceptions about the pill in particular. Programs need not only to provide young women with factual information but also to help them come up with ways to incorporate use of the pill into their daily routine (or to tie pill-taking to routines they have established for their children). Program staff should also make participants aware of the availability of such long-term contraceptives as Norplant and Depo-Provera, and of the existence of post-coital contraceptives (i.e., the "morning-after" pill). Second, programs must be proactive in providing contraceptive counseling to participants who are undergoing, or about to undergo, a major transition, and to women who are in the middle of severe crises. During these periods of special vulnerability to further pregnancy, a woman's contraceptive practices can make a real difference: one who is able to avoid pregnancy stands a better chance of getting back on track quickly, while a subsequent birth can both prolong and compound difficulties. And, third, programs should also help young women clarify their thinking about the vital issue of bringing a new life into the world. Through both group discussions and individual counseling, program participants need first to decide that they have power over their lives and then to grapple with such questions as what constitutes truly responsible behavior and whether outcomes are controlled by fate or are theirs to determine.

Personal and Family Crises

Many of the young women in the study sample came from deeply troubled families. Nine of the 34 young women had brothers or other relatives who had been incarcerated, and three others had partners who had been in jail or prison. Seven reported that a family member was an alcoholic or had a drinking problem, and four mentioned drug abuse problems within their families. One had an aunt who had been murdered. Three had close relatives who had committed suicide, and one of the respondents had herself tried to commit suicide when she was much younger. Since these numbers represent only what the respondents told the interviewer (sometimes in response to direct questions, sometimes voluntarily), the actual incidence of these problems may have been considerably higher.

Against this backdrop of disturbance, a few of the young mothers talked about situations that went beyond the usual problems they confronted. These situations might aptly be termed "crises" that deeply disrupted a young woman's sense of herself, her past, and her future, and shook her faith that anything would ever be all right for her again. The way in which program staff intervened, or failed to intervene, on behalf of a young woman in crisis could significantly affect her ability to keep "on track," as the following case studies of Letrice and Mariah suggest.

Life as Struggle: Letrice

Letrice, a graceful young woman just turned 20, struck the interviewer as having had the hardest life of any of the respondents. Her mother, an alcoholic with cirrhosis of the liver, refused to touch or embrace her daughter, claiming that doing so was physically painful; and Letrice went to live with her grandmother. The ailing woman had difficulty controlling her granddaughter, and Letrice had been placed in foster care several times by the time she was 14. A psychological evaluation conducted at that time indicated that her presenting problems included feelings of helplessness and low self-esteem, issues that persist to this day. Also of concern to the child welfare authorities were Letrice's shoplifting, her experimentation with alcohol and marijuana, and her frequent truancy. The evaluation noted that Letrice lived in a crime- and drug-ridden neighborhood, and that an older brother had also used drugs. Letrice was committed as a status offender to foster care until she was 19: "I've had a [social] worker for as long as I can remember, and I used to say I belong to the state. . . ." Her daughter was born when she was 17, and Letrice enrolled in New Chance shortly thereafter.

While attending New Chance, she had a particularly difficult time with one foster care provider; they wrangled over various childrearing practices, including how often the baby should be bathed and when she should be fed table food:

> She said I didn't feed the baby right. I had her on the bottle. And she said that when her daughter was a baby, as soon as they got her daughter home, they fed her daughter table food. And I talked to the doctor, he said, "No, that baby cannot digest that right now. You need to keep that baby on the bottle." But Miss Ann [the foster care provider] would feed her, feed my daughter table food. And that's something that I would try to tell her, "Well, I talked to the doctor." And she said, "Those doctors don't know what they're talking about." And so, you know, I didn't like it, but it was like . . . I didn't want to get smart with her, whatever, even if I would tell her, "Well, the doctor said this," she would say that I was getting smart with her, and it was her house, and she wasn't going to deal with that. So, I just felt like, well, what can I do?

Letrice left her daughter in the provider's care while she looked for another place to live, staying in a homeless shelter until she could find someone else who was willing to take her child in along with her. At that point, Letrice's life was thrown into shambles: the foster care provider sued to retain custody of Letrice's baby, claiming that she was a neglectful mother. Letrice recalled that time:

> It just did upset me so bad 'cause I . . . just the thought about somebody taking my daughter and, you know, me not being with her. . . . Or maybe she lives with somebody else, that she'll grow up and have this good life, or she can be adopted. Because see, my mother didn't raise me, and I always felt like my mother didn't want me. I don't want her growing up thinking, "Why did my mother give me away? She doesn't love me." Or, you know, "I'm unlovable."

Letrice used the phone at New Chance to call a number of lawyers, eventually finding one who was willing to take her case for free. The New Chance program director sent a letter to the foster care authorities supporting Letrice's wish to have her baby returned. The letter noted that the foster care provider had treated Letrice poorly—always finding fault with her, refusing to let her have friends visit, and locking up special foods that Letrice was forbidden to eat. Other New Chance staff members also supported and encouraged Letrice throughout this trying period. The case was resolved in Letrice's favor, and her daughter was restored to her custody.

Life since then has not been easier for Letrice. She enrolled in community college but withdrew before taking her final exams, afraid that she would fail them. She has held a series of part-time, low-paying jobs with two fast-food restaurants, a cleaning service, and a motel. Letrice and a friend decided to share an apartment, but after the friend defaulted on the rent, Letrice moved in with her mother. She says of that experience: "I was grateful to have a place to stay, you know, I wasn't out on the streets. But she didn't have heat, and it was wintertime, and our house is kind of old. . . . And we really didn't have a lot of food." Letrice moved from there into a Salvation Army shelter for about a week and eventually found a low-income apartment. The apartment itself is pleasant but roach-infested: "When I go to sleep at night, you have to brush the bed out. 'Cause they're in the bed with you, and I've had roaches crawl across my lips at night. And I hate it. And they crawl on my daughter, and she'll say, 'Mommy, roach, roach.'" Nonetheless, Letrice has lived there for a year: it is hers, it has heat, and "That [living in the apartment] seemed like almost the longest story of my life." Letrice has been removed from welfare a few times because she failed to show up for a recertification interview. And a few months before the interview, Letrice's brother, who was visiting her after having been released from jail, was drinking heavily during a card game, grew angry at her, and beat her with a kitchen chair, breaking two of her fingers (as well as the chair).

Through all of this, Letrice still struggles toward self-sufficiency and a better life, and her hopes and wishes for her daughter appear to animate that struggle:

> So, you know, that's why, no matter how many mistakes I make, I keep trying anyway as far as a job or school, I'm going to keep going, because if I die, what happens to my daughter, where is she going to be? I want to be around to see what happens with her, to raise her the best way that I can. . . . Some day, you know, I hope and I pray that I won't be poor for the rest of my life, or maybe I'll never be rich, but I just want to be able to provide better for her. . . . I love her more than I love myself. She is my life.

It is impossible to know how instrumental the support and intervention of New Chance were to Letrice's regaining custody of her child. But the program was there for her when she most needed it. And it is unlikely that Letrice would have tried so hard since then if her daughter had not been restored to her care.

"Daddy's Girl": Mariah

Mariah was very close to her father and describes herself as "daddy's girl":

> He done everything for me. He gave me everything that I wanted. Our family has always had love and everything, but as far as material things he gave me, he didn't want me to work because he was the father, and he was supposed to support us, but on the other hand, he made the rest of 'em, like my brother, work. . . . So he gave me a lot to where I didn't have to do nothing.

Her father was also a second father to her son, Larry, and a stable male presence throughout Mariah's stormy, six-year relationship with the child's father.

Mariah's life was shattered when her stepsister charged her father with aggravated incest. The case went to trial, and Mariah's father was convicted and sentenced to twelve years in prison. Mariah said, "It was like when he went to jail, I was lost. I didn't know *what* to do. I'm just now starting to get back on my feet and realize I got to live for my own self now. It's been pretty hard."

Mariah was attending New Chance at the time. She told her case manager and other program staff about the crisis that had befallen her family, and she felt that they gave her a great deal of support. She commented that participation in the program had increased her self-esteem, and that the program site was "the one place to where I felt comfortable and safe and everything was on a regular basis, it wasn't all messed up like my life was at the time." Things changed, though, after she received her GED and moved into an office skills training program at the same agency:

> Like, when I was in school, I talked to my counselor all the time, and she helped me, and my teacher, because they knew what was going on. And she helped me a lot, you know, get through it, through New Chance with it. But then, when I got into like the regular classes, she wasn't around as much. And my teacher had left to go to a new job. So, it was like they just left, and I didn't have no one again.

In fact, Mariah's former case manager was around, but not for Mariah:

> It seemed like once I got into the classes, we drifted apart. We drifted apart because there was another New Chance [entering class] coming in. Now she had to be with *those* students and be there for *them*. And I guess it just made me feel left out, because I knew she had other students, but on the other hand, I was going through a lot, and I thought I needed her then. So, but like I said, she was a busy person, and I don't, you know, have any . . . I didn't get mad at her or anything, I just felt that she wasn't there.

Mariah said she had a good relationship with her first JOBS counselor. She and her mother went to the JOBS office to tell the counselor that Mariah would be in court while her father was on trial, and that she had a number of "female complaints" that would require medical attention. They brought in a copy of the court subpoena, which the counselor said she would put in her file.

Then Mariah was assigned a new counselor, Rick, and their relationship was rocky from the start. She called him about an appointment that had been scheduled: "And he was really rude on the phone, and he goes, 'Well,' he says, 'You either be in here, or I'm cutting your grant.' And I was like . . . and this was the first time

I've ever talked to him—and he had hung up on me. I just felt he was rude." Mariah requested a different case manager but was told that caseloads were too high for her to be transferred.

Mariah was absent from training for the three days of the trial; she also missed a couple of days because of a colposcopy. Rick called her in to meet with himself and with the JTPA liaison (JTPA funds skills training at Mariah's site); this time, he required her mother to remain outside the meeting room. He told Mariah that she would need to provide documentation for her absences. According to Mariah, this would have been easy: her father's attorney and her doctors could both have sent the necessary letters. But the other things Rick said upset her greatly. First, he told her he couldn't find the copy of the subpoena she had brought in, and he expressed doubt that she had ever brought it in at all. What really enraged her, however, was his comment, "The justice system doesn't lie," and his suggestion that her father really was guilty of the crime with which he had been charged: "I thought they had no right to say that, because they weren't there, and they don't know what happened, and I just figured, I don't need to be around people like that, having them run me." Rick gave her an ultimatum: she had two days to get the requisite documentation, or she would be cut off welfare. Mariah recalled:

> And I had told him, I said, "Well, if that's the case, then I could probably get a job." He says, "Well, you go ahead and you do that, then." I was like, you know, I was trying to make the point to him that I wasn't a stupid person. . . . And after two days, they had sent me something that said, well, "You didn't reply" and they were cutting my grant. I was like, well, I said, they cut my grant . . . and I said, I just don't need it.

Without JTPA backing, Mariah had to withdraw from the training program. She told her former case manager that she would not put up with the abuse she had received, but was too embarrassed to reveal the details. Instead, she told the case manager that she was leaving training because she needed to work (and this is the explanation for her departure in Mariah's New Chance case file). In fact, after about a month, Mariah did start working, first at nights for her father's building supply store, then at K-Mart. She quit her K-Mart job at the behest of her boyfriend, who wanted her to stay home with their son. A few months later they split up for good.

Mariah is now back on welfare. Her parents have never received welfare, and she herself appears strongly motivated to work. She feels she would do well in an office "because in my class, I was like the highest typer." But so far her efforts to follow up on help-wanted ads have not yielded a job: "There's been a few who's called me back for two or three interviews, but still, it's not enough. They'll find somebody who has WordPerfect or Lotus or something, and I don't have it." She feels that she needs to get back into training in order to get a job that will enable her to support herself, and welfare offers a vehicle for getting that training: "The money part on AFDC is not a big deal. . . . If there's some way that I could get to school and for someone to pay for my daycare, that'd be great, you know. But this [being on welfare] is the easiest way to go right now."

For some time now, Mariah has been on the waiting list to get into a JOBS-sponsored office skills training program sponsored by a local community college. She was notified that an opening in the program was available—and that Rick would be her JOBS case manager. She turned down the opening and put herself back on the waiting list until a different case manager was available. She said of Rick and the JTPA liaison:

> They were the two people that I would not ever want to have anything to do with as far as schooling any more. Because they made it a really bad experience for me. 'Cause they had no feeling whatsoever for what I was going through. Just, "You do this and you do this. . . ." They just really made me feel like dirt again.

If Letrice's case illustrates the potential of programs to intervene positively on a client's behalf, Mariah's story exemplifies the damage unskilled counselors can do, especially when they have limited psychological acumen and overstep their areas of professional expertise. Whatever Rick's intentions, it was surely a counseling error to hint at her father's guilt when he barely knew Mariah and could not guess the depth of the filial bond. Mariah's account also points to the need for someone who could have intervened with the JOBS and JTPA workers, suggested using discretion in enforcing the regulations, or argued more forcefully for a change of case managers. Had Mariah still felt close to her New Chance case manager, that person could have filled the bill. But, aware that her case manager had many other responsibilities, Mariah felt "left out." Thus, it is clients who pay the price when those who are supposed to be helping them are overloaded with cases.

Part III

Chapter 6

Going with the Tide

A strong tide of forces—both internal and external—prevents some disadvantaged young women from taking advantage of programs such as New Chance to improve their lives and, of equal importance, the lives of their children. Thus, however effective for more motivated, more capable, or less troubled young women, these programs may fail to reach and touch those who lack these assets. In the case of 16 young women who left the New Chance program before obtaining a GED certificate,[1] New Chance did not—perhaps could not—equip them with the skills, strengths, and will to swim—alone if necessary—against that tide.

The young women's backgrounds and experiences reveal a cluster of interwoven psychological and developmental themes. These issues emerge in sharp relief partly as a result of the researcher's perspective as a developmental psychologist, and partly because they are prominent themes in the young women's own stories about their lives.[2] The themes pertain to the personal and interpersonal factors that further or impede the motivation and capacity for positive growth and change, in the domains not merely of school and work but also of parenting and other interpersonal relationships, and help to explain a young mother's present situation. They may also predict where they—and their children—will be in the years ahead. In revealing how these themes operate in transactions between young mothers from disorganized or multiproblem homes and programs designed to help them succeed, the two chapters in Part III aim to show how interventions do—or do not—mesh with who these young women are, what they want, and what they are capable of doing to obtain it.

This chapter first considers the women's backgrounds before they joined New Chance, then examines their experiences in the program, and, finally, considers their activities after leaving New Chance and the transitional character of their lives at present, exemplified by their relationships with men. Chapter 7 takes note of the significant degree of variation within the pre-GED sample, and its implications for program design.

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[1] As noted in Chapter 1, study participants were divided into the GED and pre-GED samples on the basis of their status as of February 1992. One respondent in the pre-GED sample did, in fact, earn her GED through New Chance after that date but was retained in this study because she shared many characteristics with other pre-GED sample members.

[2] While the emphasis of this chapter is on psychological themes, the importance of other factors in shaping the young women's lives should not be overlooked. Table 1.2 indicates, for example, that upon entry into New Chance, the reading scores of women in the pre-GED sample were lower than those of the GED attainers, reflecting, perhaps, the generally lower cognitive ability of women in the pre-GED group.

Life Before New Chance: The Young Mothers' Own Mothers and the Consequences of Poor Parenting

One striking finding is the persistence and continuity of certain themes over time. One is the importance to these young women of personal relationships—the touchstone and center of their universe. Family members and familial relationships are salient in the young women's account of their current experiences as well as in their chronicles of their earlier lives. Sometimes these relationships are for the better; too often, they are for the worse. The biographies of many young women illustrate all too clearly the negative and enduring consequences of growing up in poverty and of inadequate parents. These consequences include not only poor school performance, early pregnancy, and school dropout, but also, and significantly, the absence of critical maturational experiences and opportunities.

A history of poor parenting from childhood on has psychological repercussions that persist into the adolescent years. Often an adolescent's psychological energy becomes focused on denying or repressing painful feelings and events, on seeking emotional attachment, and on trying to make sure that those she loves will not leave her. Issues that are successfully resolved by very young children in relatively healthy families divert those from more troubled families from the key psychological tasks that undergird adolescent and, later, adult competence. Thus, accomplishment of the most important task of adolescence—the establishment of an individual identity—is critically delayed. In emotional and maturational terms, adolescents from disturbed homes are always playing "catch-up" when compared with their age peers from psychologically supportive families. The pull of unmet developmental needs—especially during the transitional and highly challenging periods of adolescence and young adulthood—may also be more powerful than anything the worlds of school or work have to offer.

In past decades, if the men in a family were absent or marginal, there was at least a cadre of strong, caring adult women to help the family's teenage mothers—to raise their children, help them get back on their feet, and generally hold the family together. Today, for a variety of reasons, this is less often the case. A few young women interviewed for this study appeared to come from families that have been loving and supportive throughout their lives. Thus, Teresa sees her mother as an encouraging, positive role model:

> She encourages me a lot because she had four kids and their dad wasn't around and she was working two jobs and she was never on the AFDC or nothing like that, and she's a real hard-working person and she wanted to work for her kids. [Before Teresa and her brother were born] she had to hold down two jobs to support her and the four kids.

But the majority of these young women—while they were growing up and throughout their adolescent years—have suffered continuously poor nurturing, repeated separations (or outright abandonment), or loss of mothers or other emotionally significant parental figures. Only five of the 16 young mothers were raised consistently by their own mothers.

Some of the inadequate mothers were preoccupied with problems of their own and therefore unavailable—as was the mother of Isabel, a truant throughout junior high school. She recalled:

> My mom and dad weren't together. It was like my mom was the only one in the house and she used to work at night. She'd have to sleep during the day and so, like, she didn't force us [to go to school] because she was probably too tired and she was the only parent. It was hard for her.

Other respondents were left with, and raised by, other people because their mothers were incapable of caring for them. For example, Lucia and Alicia are half-sisters, and their mother is a drug addict who was in and out of jail repeatedly while they were growing up. Their father (who is Lucia's biological father) has been in jail for murder for the past nineteen years. Whereas Lucia was in foster care for most of her childhood, Alicia was more fortunate in being brought up (as virtually an only child) by her grandmother, a very nurturing woman. Alicia remarked: "I know she loved me a lot. She really cared for me. Like before school [she always said], 'I love you. I'll see you after school.'"

Half of the respondents in this sample were raised by a grandmother. Indeed, a participant who referred to her "mother" often meant her grandmother.[3] Thus, one young woman noted, "My grandmother raised all of us and even my sister. . . . So, I called her 'mother' and called my mother, Mary, by her name."

The majority of these young women also lacked consistent exposure to parents who worked. (In this respect, they differ from the young women in the GED sample, of whom 59 percent had mothers who were working when they entered New Chance and 49 percent came from families that had never received welfare; for the pre-GED group, the corresponding statistics were 38 and 31 percent, respectively.) Of those respondents' mothers who were employed at one time or another, several are now on disability.[4] Most striking, not only were mothers as well as (nearly always absent) fathers unemployed, but many were troubled individuals— mentally ill or drug abusers or alcoholics, currently or recently in prison. It is also striking that similar kinds of family pathology and disorganization were found in white, black, and Hispanic families.

These difficult life circumstances—ones the study subjects may even have helped to create—have propelled them into the world of young adulthood and parenthood, a world for which they are often profoundly unprepared.[5] All the young women were able to tell the interviewer what was going on in their lives at the time of their first pregnancy. In most cases, as noted before, it involved some serious interpersonal or family stress. Many recalled that this was a particularly bad time because it coincided with their mother (or grandmother) becoming ill (or dying), abandoning the family, or being emotionally unavailable.

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[3] Some of these caretakers carried out a wide range of parental functions and were sources of emotional support for the young women; these young women fared better than their counterparts who lacked a consistent parental figure.

[4] The parents of the two young women in this sample who eventually did get a GED had never received public assistance. This was also the case for another young woman, who could not be interviewed because she was so involved in her work and wedding plans.

[5] Few of the young women reported that they had seriously contemplated abortion; the majority said they were against it (although several had had abortions in the past).

One young woman dropped out of high school before her first pregnancy and, at the same time, left home to live with her child's father. She said she was having "a lot of problems": "We were living with people, and my mom didn't have a steady life for us, and I just left." Asked how she felt when she learned she was pregnant, she said, "I was kinda happy, yeah. 'Cause I was starting my own life and I always tell myself they weren't gonna be like the way I was. I was starting my life off then when I got pregnant."

Another young woman recalled that both her grandparents were dying of cancer when she became pregnant with her son. And a third remembered:

> I needed someone to comfort, and I wanted someone to comfort me back, because my mother, she wasn't showing me too much attention. She wasn't the type of person I could sit down and talk to and tell her my problems and tell her about how I felt about this or felt about that. So I just said, well, maybe me keeping my baby would make me feel a little better.

And so it did, she reported: "It helped me a lot."

When asked what, if anything, might have diverted them from early parenthood and school dropout to begin with, a number of the young mothers answered that "a stable home and parents who cared" would have made a difference. Two replies were typical:

> If my mother and father was there for me like everybody, I would probably have kids now, but I don't think I would have no five. All my friends that I grew up with, their mother and father were there for them. They used to tease me [about] what my mother did, what my father [an addict] did, how I lived with my grandmother.

> I could have had better encouragement. More of a push, shove, from my mother. If she would have said no; if she would have been firm with me, "No, I want you to stay in school. I want you to finish."

The problems involved in adolescent pregnancy are circular and densely interconnected. For example, the psychological consequences of too early childbearing can further impede development already delayed by a history of inadequate parenting: that is, when difficulties created by unmet needs for security and love lead a girl to premature parenthood, the oft[illegible]ining and difficult psychological consequences of that situation are likely to further hold her back. The continuously poor parenting suffered by many of the young women in this small sample—the repeated psychological and actual abandonment—impeded their maturation, diminishing the capacity (as well as the opportunity) to meet and master age-appropriate developmental tasks. One young woman anticipates a prolonged late adolescence: "I think maybe in a couple of years I'll be ready to go back to school, 'cause I'm 21 now and I hope to finish my GED and get a job and everything by the time I'm 30."

It is not surprising, therefore, that the data point to a certain circularity in behavior. Many young women's personal histories exhibit recurrent patterns: troubled relationships with family members and partners that often elicit the same responses—pregnancy and dropping out—throughout later adolescence and early adulthood. Also predictable, and even more disturbing, is that in the worst cases, the young women, through their parenting, transmit their own vulnerabilities to their children—an issue discussed in the next chapter.

Difficulties in meeting the academic and other challenges of a program like New Chance may then place further strain on these young women, making their participation highly vulnerable to disruption, as discussed below.

New Chance: Intervention or Interruption

The reasons a young woman gives for entering a program such as New Chance reflect her direction—or the lack thereof. When asked why they chose to join the program, young women in this group were often very general or very concrete. Several said they had wanted a GED. Unlike young women who succeeded in getting a GED, however, few pre-GED sample members said that they had sought a program to help them change and make something of their lives, or that they were bored and tired of staying home just watching TV. Some came to the program because their welfare caseworker told them about it.

Attitudes Toward the Program

Most of the young women said they had liked New Chance very much. They felt that they knew what they were there to accomplish, and that staff members knew what they were doing. When asked if they would add or change anything about the program, most said they felt it was fine just as it was. Repeatedly, former participants compared New Chance to other GED or job training programs with which they were familiar, and without exception, judged it to be superior: it offered more personal attention and help, as well as more concerned and empathic people to talk to.

Teresa, who after two years did succeed in earning her GED through New Chance, talked about the encouragement the staff gave her and about some of the reasons it took her such a long time:

> 'Cause I had gave up and I left the program. I didn't really leave, but I would always be absent, 'cause I gave up, and I didn't think I could do it. And then I would go, and then they [staff members] helped me have confidence in myself and told me that just to take the time, I'd be able to do it. So, I did it.

Others commented on the extent to which New Chance was a force for positive change in their lives, in terms of personal development as well as of their development as parents.

None of the young women blamed the program for their dropping out; indeed, many said that they would have liked to return but couldn't, for one reason or another. Instead, they tended to blame their own inattention and lack of motivation. The following responses are typical:

> I didn't feel I was accomplishing anything because my mind was on other things . . . not being comfortable as far as my living standards and things that were going on at home. I just took it out on everybody, my attitude was bad. I had a lot of things on my mind. And from me having a lot of things on my mind, I couldn't get my work done. . . . Because I was either fooling around or . . . I really didn't take it as for being in school . . . and now that I got older and have a little more kids [she had two more children] than when I started the program, and that's very important. Education is very important to me now. . . . I guess they did basically all that they could do. It was just that I was the type of person that just didn't want to talk to anybody. I felt I was embarrassed to tell someone my problems. And couldn't nobody help me anyway. So they couldn't do nothing if I didn't want to help them do anything.

> When somebody tells you that you can do it, and you sit there and you tell that person, I know I can do it, I am going to accomplish. Then you drop out of school and this person that was facing you, you disappointed him; not only him, but you disappointed yourself, too.

But if these young women did not blame New Chance for their departure, the program appears to have had little effect on the lives of many of them and to have been unable to compete with the powerful forces that had held them back in the past and continued to do so afterward.

During the interviews, many young women referred to the fact that New Chance participants all had certain things in common and were all "equal":

> Everybody was in the same position, everybody had kids, everybody was on aid, nobody was better than anybody there.

> I really felt comfortable around my surroundings. The girls they were, we were all equal, nobody was different. . . . So I felt comfortable.

> You were there with a bunch of girls that were having the same problems as you. They were young and had babies.

> All of them had kids just like me. . . . That's what we had in common is that we all have kids.

Although it is important to feel good, ultimately one must do good as well; and although "feeling comfortable" may be a necessary first step, it is not a sufficient one for meaningful change. Change usually requires taking the risk of moving beyond the familiar. New Chance may need to build in considerably more contact with women who come from similar circumstances as the participants but are now working in a wide variety of areas, women who have already taken the necessary risk and in whom the participants can find appropriate role models for themselves.

Reasons for Dropping Out

Dropping out may not be the "fault" of either New Chance or of the participants. Rather, it reflects the mismatch between New Chance and the needs, capacities, and daily lives of at least some of its participants. The same factors that prompted a number of the respondents to drop out of high school also led to their departure from New Chance: pregnancy, housing problems, lack of child care, and insufficient support from family members or partners.

Pregnancy problems and "problem pregnancies." Pregnancy was the single most common explanation given for leaving the program; seven of the 16 respondents cited this as the main reason they left. The respondents offered a number of explanations related to their contraceptive behavior. Some said they were not using family planning because it didn't occur to them: "I just never thought about it. It never crossed my mind." ". . . I didn't even think about it. I should have been [thinking about it], but I wasn't." Many said they were glad to be pregnant.

Pregnancy was also frequently blamed on "problems" with the oral contraceptive. Young women of all ethnic backgrounds subscribed to many folk medicine myths pertaining to the pill and its problems and limitations. A common explanation for pregnancy was some sort of failure regarding the taking of birth control pills. Some respondents saw that failure as their own:

> Basically I was on a method of birth control with the third one [baby]. It was that I was taking them [the pills] at the wrong times. . . . I was talking to my doctor and he was saying, you're supposed to take them the same time every day. And that wasn't something I was doing. I thought that, you know, as long as I took them, I felt I was protected and evidently I wasn't.

> I was taking the pill, and I got pregnant while I was taking the pill. . . . Like when you miss you can take it the next day. I would miss it a couple of times. I missed it like three times.

Sometimes failure was attributed to the pill itself. One young woman claimed to have been taking birth control pills before her last three children: "I was taking it regularly. I've been tested. I'm 99 percent fertile. Birth control pills don't work on it. I found that out!" And sometimes the user blamed both herself and the pill:

> I was taking birth control methods, but the birth control medicine had messed up my sight. My doctor took me off of 'em so he could find out what he was gonna put me on. So when he took me off of 'em I got pregnant, in between the time he took me off of 'em to give me more.

> I was taking the birth control pills but I was getting a lot of like sore throats and stuff and I was taking a lot of antibiotics and I wasn't using nothing else, and the pill doesn't work with the antibiotics.

Every young woman who dropped out of New Chance due to pregnancy attributed her dropping out not merely to being pregnant but to pregnancy-related illness or incapacity. Respondents repeatedly remarked that they were too sick (usually with morning sickness) to attend classes; further, they reported being nauseated for most of their pregnancy, not only for the first trimester, as is typical with morning sickness (although none of the women actually had serious pregnancy-related conditions, such as toxemia or placenta previa):

> I was pregnant with Sonny and I was sick. I was sick and just didn't feel like catching the bus and going to school.

> I got pregnant and I was sick all the time, and they couldn't allow me to stay in school [New Chance] being sick like that all the time.

It seems likely, then, that in addition to the desire for a baby, pregnancy and its attendant difficulties can also allow a young woman unconsciously to avoid program-related tasks she finds too difficult—or, indeed, to escape any potential challenge or change she may fear. Psychological issues concerning potential separation and loss were behind these pregnancies as well: having another baby is often a way to avoid—at least for the moment—not only the risk of failure but also the fear that one's success may alienate, perhaps forever, significant others. As one young woman commented, "I think when one person's not doing good, then you know it's really hard to see someone else doing good. . . . A lot of people just discourage me."

Housing problems. Four young women left New Chance in part because unstable living arrangements interfered with their ability to participate in program activities. (For two of these young women, housing problems and other issues interfering with participation were intertwined.) Lisa, who also became pregnant, describes how her housing troubles contributed to her dropping out of New Chance:

> I went to New Chance, and then I ended up getting pregnant and I stopped going. I could have went while I was pregnant, but I was sick all the time, I wasn't like in a steady place. I was living here and there . . . with friends. I didn't know when I was going to go to school and what day I was going to miss, and I didn't want to keep going through that, so I just told them I didn't feel well. . . . I wanted to get up and do something, but it was just my living. I couldn't be here and there, you know.

Although Jenny left New Chance in part because she had difficulty getting reimbursed for child care expenses, her lack of residential stability made it unlikely that she would rejoin the program. Asked if anyone from New Chance tried to reach her after she left, she said, "Yeah, for a few times. But I had moved around a little bit, and so it was kind of hard to locate me."

Interpersonal conflicts sometimes caused housing difficulties that interfered with a young woman's ability to maintain program participation. These young women have housing problems not merely because they are poor, but also because their social surround is unpredictable, conflict-ridden, and sometimes violent. One young woman explained that she had left New Chance because of "personal problems": "It forced me to move on this side of town. It kind of involved my life. . . . Somebody was threatening my life." And another:

> I came [to New Chance] when it was, you know, possible for me to come. But, like I said, I've been going through a lot of problems. . . . At the time I was staying with my kids' father's mother, and I . . . it was basically that she wasn't satisfied with me. I don't think she really wanted me to be there. Because it was like everything, she would pick, everything wasn't good enough for her. She had

> other kids, and we didn't get along. So, I said I should leave if I'm not wanted here.

Housing difficulties could also upset one's contraceptive efforts. Said one young woman: "I was on birth control pills, and then when I left my mother's house they were there. And I kind of couldn't go back and get my stuff. So I couldn't get any more at the time. So I didn't have any." Another "never thought" about the possibility of getting pregnant: "There was just so much going on."

Here, then, is a series of circular, intertwined themes. Adolescents drop out of school and out of New Chance because they are having trouble at home or because they are pregnant. And, they get pregnant because they are having trouble at home, and then drop out because they are pregnant and "too sick" to continue, and also because they have no stable living arrangements.

Lack of child care and children's illnesses. A few young women said they dropped out partly because they could not locate or pay for adequate child care. Asked why, by her own admission, she had not completed anything she started, Rita, who had three children when she enrolled in New Chance, replied:

> Some of it was my fault, but I didn't have no babysitter. My one baby was in the [New Chance site's] daycare center. The other one was too old to be up there, and this one was too young. So I wasn't going to leave nobody at home. I didn't trust nobody with my kids.

And another respondent reported a "bad experience" she had with her daughter's daycare:

> I took her out the same time I left there [New Chance] because I was having problems with the daycare, too, because I had walked in one time and some lady was hitting a kid with a stick. I couldn't take her [the daughter] out because since I was going through the JOBS program to go to New Chance, if I stopped going, I'd get cut off. And I was telling her about the [nursery] school, and they said you just have to keep going. So, I just finally, you know, said I can't hang with this, you know.

Two other mothers told of not being able to take the GED test because their child became ill and needed to be hospitalized on the day it was administered.

Lack of support from family members and partners. Underlying their specific reasons for leaving New Chance is the fact that, as during their earlier adolescent years, many of the young women were neither supported emotionally nor helped practically by family members and partners. The families of many, though not all, of these women rarely enabled them to attend regularly and make the best possible use of a program such as New Chance.[6] For example, partners and relatives might provide child care "in a pinch," but not on a steady, reliable basis that the young women could count on. And although some young women had family members or partners who could or would drive them where they needed to go, including the program, most did not—sometimes because they did not have a car.

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[6] Indeed, as noted in the next chapter, a number of these young women are basically the providers of support to others—the givers rather than the receivers of help.

The subjects' partners were, with only a few exceptions, unskilled and often unemployed. Their occupations consisted of "working on cars," unsteady jobs in construction, working nights at discount stores, and shipping and receiving; one man was a drug dealer. The young men's own economic marginality (and, perhaps, attendant psychological insecurity) frequently meant they could not lend wholehearted support to the young women's aspirations for a better life. Although the young women often said that their partners were supportive, the evidence indicates that the support was rarely more than something like "He thinks that it's good I want to do something with my life"—not the concrete actions that would facilitate a young woman's efforts to get ahead.

Some partners actively undermined their girlfriends' participation in New Chance. One young woman described her boyfriend's jealousy when she joined the program.

> At first [her boyfriend] thought there were guys, 'cause he was like a little bit jealous, and he thought there were guys in the classes. I said, no, there were no guys in the classes, it's all girls. And so finally he went to drop me off one day, and he looked and he saw all girls in there and no guys. [So then] he encouraged me to stay in school.

Rita's partner was not so easily mollified.

> My kids' father, my oldest kid's father, he lived with us for a little while and he didn't want to get out and get no job, he didn't want to watch the kids while I went to school and stuff like that. He just wanted me to be around him and he be around me. . . . And he used to be physically abusive, hit me and stuff like that. When I called the cops the last time and I got a PFA [protection from abuse order], I said that was it.

She said he also didn't want her to go to New Chance and wouldn't take the children to doctors and dentists when necessary: "I would have to take a half a day of school to take the kids for appointments."

Rita talked about the need for programs to help participants get their own lives on the right track by helping them to solve their personal problems and especially to sever self-destructive relationships with men.

> Even though you can leave your boyfriend behind and forget him or whatever, some girls are like myself who really love their boyfriends or husbands or something. And it's hard. It's easy for somebody to say, but it's hard for someone who is in love to do that.

Life After New Chance

Post-Program Activities

Figure 6.1 shows the number and proportion of study subjects who, after leaving New Chance, ever participated in each of four activities: school (invariably a GED course, since none of the respondents attended college); vocational skills training; employment; and volunteer work. (Again, the figure does not portray the relative amount of time in each activity.)

There are several points of interest about the post-New Chance activities of these young women. First, almost all of them (13 of the 16) took part in at least one activity after leaving New Chance. Seven made efforts to continue preparing for the GED test: one returned to New Chance to do so, four enrolled in other GED programs, and two were studying at home for the test (one of these was taking a correspondence course). Four of the young women entered skills training courses (three in the medical area, one in cosmetology), four worked for periods ranging from one and a half months to two years, and two volunteered regularly in their children's schools. Only three young women did none of these things, essentially staying home with their children throughout the period.

Second, only three of the 16 young women in this group did more than one thing during the time they were studied. In this way, they differed sharply from the women who achieved a GED (see Part II) and subsequently engaged in many activities either simultaneously or sequentially (e.g., attending training, then working).

Third, the fact that 10 out of the 16 participants in this study said that they intended to train for work in the health care field, principally as a medical or dental assistant or a nurse's aide, may reflect the profusion of (mainly proprietary) schools offering training for this work, rather than the number of jobs available. Several others wanted to be cosmetologists, a field in which there is a dearth of employment opportunities but a plethora of beauty schools. One young woman discussed her dissatisfaction with the proprietary school she was attending:

> It's not anything you expected it to be. To me, the reason I keep going is because I have to pay for it out of my pocket, so . . . there's no sense in stopping. . . . You don't get that much hands-on like they tell you. It's not a good school like the way they made it seem [when it was advertised on TV]. It's false advertising.

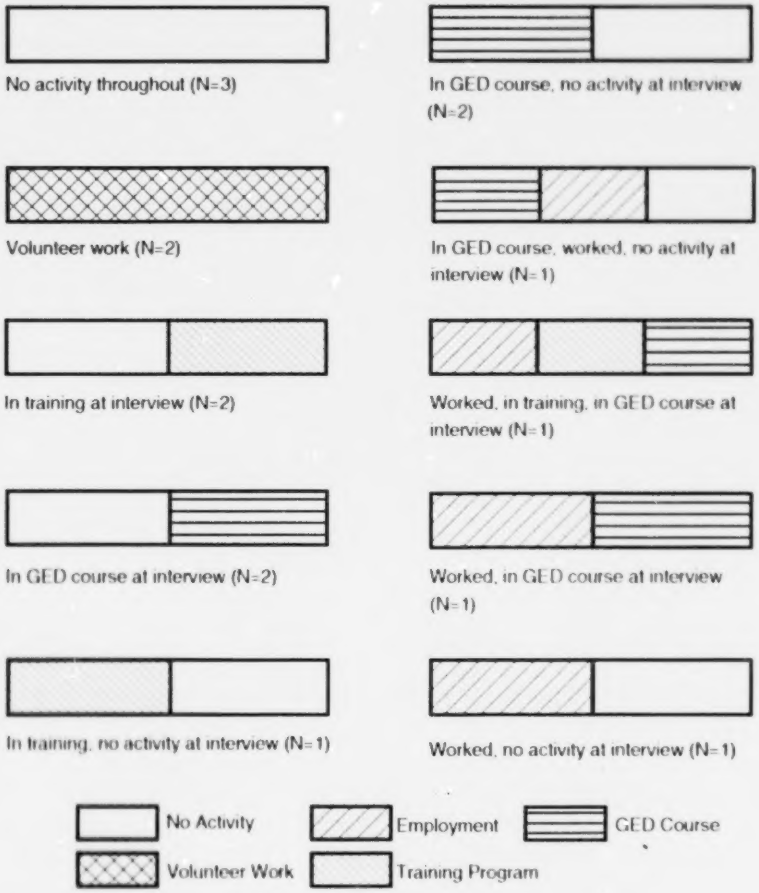
She said she did not know anybody who had graduated from the program and gotten a good job:

> I feel like they haven't taught me enough. We've told them, and they don't really say nothing. A teacher's supposed to be one-on-one and help you, and they don't. We've heard that if you tell them, "We go to [name of school]," "Well, we don't want anybody from [school] because you're not taught right."

In fact, the respondents tended to be vague about their future work and life goals. Some aspired to occupations that seem unrealistic, such as lawyer or pediatrician. Other occupations were more within their capability—probation officer,

FIGURE 6.1

SEQUENCE OF POST-NEW CHANCE ACTIVITIES OF INTERVIEW RESPONDENTS IN THE PRE-GED GROUP



No activity throughout (N=3)

In GED course, no activity at interview (N=2)

Volunteer work (N=2)

In GED course, worked, no activity at interview (N=1)

In training at interview (N=2)

Worked, in training, in GED course at interview (N=1)

In GED course at interview (N=2)

Worked, in GED course at interview (N=1)

In training, no activity at interview (N=1)

Worked, no activity at interview (N=1)

No Activity
Employment
GED Course
Volunteer Work
Training Program

beautician, dental or medical assistant, dispatcher, and preschool teacher.[7] However, on further questioning few were aware of what these occupations actually entailed, or how one prepared oneself to carry them out. Lucia, for example, seemed to believe that, once she received her GED, she would be able to get a job immediately: "I'm going tomorrow to start the classes of going to get my GED. . . . That's what I'm going to do, just get my GED, and so then after I have the baby, I just could go into whatever I want to do right away." At various points during the interview, she expressed interest in working in a hospital emergency room ("where the action is"), at the Children's Shelter where she herself was raised, or as a paralegal.

Finally, a few of the women counted as having "ever participated" in given activities actually had made little effort. At one extreme, one young woman who enrolled in a GED program attended only one day. One young woman included as participating in skills training had begun a dental assistant training program only the week before the interview; she had not done anything else in the six months since leaving New Chance. And one young woman counted as having worked was formally employed for only about six weeks in the Halloween shop of a department store; she also helped out occasionally at a relative's auto supply store. The majority have not engaged in a sustained activity of any type. All are currently receiving AFDC or waiting to get back on it.

Young Women and Their Partners

In a variety of ways, these young women are, like many young adults today, still adolescents—still actively engaged in resolving the developmental tasks of early, middle, and later adolescence. Adolescence is, above all, a transitional period, and these young women's lives are still, to some degree, in transition. Thus, in recognizing that she was "wild" and a "grouch" until recently, but that "in the last two years I calmed down, and my attitude just changed," Corinne was describing a developmental shift, one she attributes to time and to changes within herself.

The degree to which young women have made this transition is illustrated and exemplified in part by their reproductive behavior and by the varying roles men play in their lives. While several young women said they were neither involved with anyone at present nor having sex, the majority spoke of planning to have a tubal ligation, Norplant, or an IUD. As one young woman put it, "I'm planning on getting a five-year birth control that they put in your arm. Implant [she meant Norplant]. I want to get that after I have the baby so it won't happen until I could get stuff together and what I want to do and stuff." Although several young women already have Norplant, and one has an IUD, so far none has actually had a tubal ligation. They view methods such as tubal ligation, Norplant, and the IUD as the only "foolproof" methods for avoiding further pregnancies, and thus may be recognizing the impracticability of relying on either themselves or their partners to be consistent about contraception.

Some young women, because of their strong need for emotional attachment, remain deeply involved with men who, to all appearances, are "bad" for them—jealous, unsupportive, sometimes violent. Troubled relations with men, obsessions with them, or fears of alienating them can divert these young women, throw them off track, and rob them of the will to get ahead.

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[7] The young woman who spoke of being a preschool teacher was probably referring to the occupation of paraprofessional teacher's aide rather than that of trained teacher.

Tracey, for example, has never really extricated herself from the volatile, on-and-off relationship she has with Ron, the father of her five children, an unpredictable man who behaves violently when he drinks. She has been with him since age 14, when she became pregnant with their oldest child. He was 18 at the time. Through the years, they have lived together in two apartments of their own and together at both of their parents' houses. Today Tracey lives with her children and her parents in the latter's house. She obtained an order of protection from Ron after he tried to strangle her in front of their children. Tracey's strong, albeit ambivalent, attachment to Ron surfaces in her narrative of their relationship. At first, she said, her parents liked him: "But since everything that went on, they can't stand him. They don't want me around him at all." As for herself remaining "around him," she said, "For the kids, yeah. Yeah. For myself, no." She said he had been working until she got the order of protection:

> They arrested him on his job. And so he lost his job. He's got a trade in welding. . . . He had went to Job Corps and got his trade, so when he came back he was working off and on, off and on, you know, different jobs. But when he got in trouble this last time, he did have a good job and I didn't know it at the time. And if I wouldn't have pressed charges on him, the kids would have been under his insurance.

Tracey doesn't know what their future will be:

> He wants to get married right now, and I'm trying to tell him no. I said, "The only reason I'm talking to you is because of the children. You know they need you around, you know. And I'm tired of playing the mommy and daddy role. I need your help with them."

She is clearly torn between her memories of the positive aspects of their life together and his behavior when drinking:

> Every time he gets to drinking and he's around his [family], he gets violent. Not necessarily at me, but he gets violent, and then when I try to calm him down, he gets violent towards me. . . . Like I'm trying to explain to my mom, he's never done anything wrong to the kids. These are his, I cannot keep them from him. . . . You know, it's like, I would like to get back with him. We did, we had a very nice life together.

One young woman commented on her partner's mixed response to her decision to return to school:

> He encourages me, but I think he's worried that I'm going to make more money than him. 'Cause he always tells me, "Oh you're not going to make more than me." . . . I think he's kind of nervous about me going out [in the world to return to school and eventually to go to work]. He probably thinks I'm going to go find

> somebody else. But, you know, it's not like that, I don't think like that. I think that's what he's thinking, that I'm going to find somebody else and leave him.

An educated, more advantaged young woman may be both a "woman who loves too much" and also a teacher, an accountant, or a wife. But disadvantaged young females lack these assets and thus have no margin for error: once thrown off course, it is much harder for them to get back on it.

Not surprisingly, a signal of the commitment of other young women to change their lives for the better is the decision either to do without male companionship or consciously to choose a "better" man for a partner. Thus, Isabel can now say "I want my life to be different"—a decision to move forward that has been motivated by a combination of developmental readiness and the guidance of caring, growth-fostering adults, the right people at the right time for her:

> Gradually it just came to me, and I just decided, you know. I tried one time when I was younger, I think I was about 18 or 19, to go to a school to get my GED, but it was just, like, they hand you your work and it was, like, you're on your own. I was lost. I didn't know what I was doing, so I just went a few days and stopped. Ever since then I didn't go back until I went to New Chance, and that had been like a couple of years. There I liked it, I mean I guess it was the staff, you know. They were really nice and you could talk to them and, you know, friendly. Everybody was friendly. They taught you step by step and stuff like that.

Isabel now lives with her children in a house where she rents a room. Although she has never worked either before or since New Chance, she is training to be a dental assistant, attending school four evenings per week: "I was looking to go to school. I wanted to change my life. Go to school, get my GED and I wanted to get a job." The children's father is "always in and out of jail, so it's not like a relationship." Isabel hasn't had a boyfriend since him and says she isn't interested in finding one: "I just want to get a job. I'm doing it [going to school] for my kids, so we can be on our own."

Lisa, who has two little girls and is now in a medical assistant training program, said of her current partner:

> He's not the dad of either girl. . . . He works . . . he has a daughter, and he's raising his daughter. He has his own place around the corner. He's got himself together. That's what I needed—somebody that has himself together. . . . Ever since I met my boyfriend, well, I always say I'm going to quit, you know, it's getting too hard. But [he says], "No, 'cause you need the job, you know, with the kids." He just, like, pushes me to go. 'Cause no one else is going to support me.

Often the new partner comes from a family that can furnish the young woman with the guidance, role models, and support she knows she will need as she tries to move ahead. Andrea described her perceptions of how her boyfriend's family life differs from her own:

> Let's just say that he has someone to sit down and to ask, "How do you feel today? Are you O.K.? How are things going along with you?" I don't have too many people to ask me those questions. It's like I said, it's basically on me to sit down and say to myself, "Well, are you O.K. today, Andrea? How do you feel?"

Although the drug-addicted mother of Lucia and Alicia was in and out of jail and thus absent for most of their childhood and adolescence, the half-sisters have both found men whose mothers are warm, caring, and hardworking as well. These men may not be steady workers and good providers, yet through the "gift" of their families—especially their mothers—they provide something the sisters seriously need and highly value. Thus, Lucia said:

> Lou's mom, his sisters, they're all really nice to me. They try to help any way they can. . . . Like Lou's family, they work hard constantly. Always working. [Lou's mom,] she's really nice. She's a church lady. . . . I think Lou's mother really raised them up good. She did. She did a good job. I wish I had a mom like that.

Alicia reported that the only help she got from her own family was from Lucia; otherwise, she counted on her boyfriend's family: "My boyfriend's mom comes and take the kids for the day. If I ever need anything, she's there to help me." In such cases as these, the young women have found themselves not only new partners but new and better families as well.

Thus, as a group the young women who left New Chance without getting a GED were held back in the struggle to become economically independent and to create a better life for themselves and their children by a web of complex problems. Yet as the last section demonstrates, some study subjects are dealing with these difficulties more effectively than others. Recognizing this variation is, as the next chapter argues, critical for developing effective programs and policies for young mothers.

Chapter 7

Different Groups, Different Needs

The interviews and home visits conducted as part of this study reveal that the young mothers in the pre-GED group are a heterogeneous lot, varying in their supports and skills, interests and aptitudes, and basic mental health and character traits. Some young women are doing much better than others and could, under the right circumstances, make considerable progress. Others have many more disadvantages to overcome.

Although some are very troubled and depressed, few if any would be diagnosed as psychiatrically ill. And, while some have limited social and educational skills, none appeared to be impaired enough to require Supplemental Security Income (SSI), a form of public assistance for the elderly and disabled.[1] Nor do these young women exhibit serious social pathology: none report being engaged in criminal activities or substance abuse, even though a number of their family members or partners are, or were, so engaged. These are, in the main, nice young women. Many are somewhat passive and, at times, inadvertently self-destructive or self-defeating; still, they manage and cope.

However diverse the mothers in the pre-GED sample, in considering sensible interventions it is useful to divide them into two groups, approximately equal in size: the "detoured" and the "derailed." Young women who have been "detoured" show markedly greater potential for future success than those who have been "derailed" from a healthy developmental path. The issues faced by these two groups have different implications for programs and policies. This chapter will examine the two groups and the different interventions each may require.

Two aspects of character and behavior were especially critical in determining to which group a young woman belongs. The first, self-efficacy, means that one is capable of goal-directedness and persistence and has both a sense of personal responsibility for one's life and a feeling that what one does makes a difference. The second criterion is parenting capacity: that is, a young woman's behavior is evaluated from an intergenerational perspective to determine not simply whether she is likely to realize her own developmental destiny, but also whether she is capable of enabling her children to realize theirs.

A strong, positive sense of self-worth and its correlate, self-efficacy, are perhaps the most crucial personal qualities for the young woman who seeks to escape from chronic poverty. Where many forces act to sidetrack her and keep her where she is, only a steady will and self-determination can propel her forward and keep her moving against the tide; only her unflagging resolution to do what is necessary can help her make use of resources to enable her to succeed. Isabel, who is representative of the "detoured" group, commented:

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[1] This conclusion is based on the author's clinical and research experience with women who are likely to be on SSI for life.

> I don't want to depend on anybody, because—who knows? One day they're there, and the next day they might not be there, and I have to be responsible for my own kids. They're not my dad's, they're not my mom's, they're not my sister's, they're mine. I chose to have them.

The capacity to take personal responsibility is an important element of self-efficacy. Isabel's words represent more than her desire to be independent; they also signify a recognition of the role she herself plays in determining her actions and their consequences. In contrast, for Claudia, who had been in three different high schools and one other program for young parents before joining New Chance, things just seem to "happen," both in her reproductive behavior and in other domains of her life. She had, for example, not planned to have either of her two children: "They just came as a surprise." And her susceptibility to being distracted—especially by her friends—has repeatedly blocked her capacity to move ahead and get her GED: "When I'm in school, I don't sit there and really concentrate on what I'm doing. My mind will sidetrack off."

As for the conspicuous differences in attitudes toward parenting and in patterns of childrearing, in general the respondents in the detoured group not only take pride in their role as parents but appear to do a good job of it. Alicia, who was raised by her grandmother owing to her mother's being incapacitated by drugs (see Chapter 6), says of her own relationships with her two children: "I think I'm a good mom. All I really had was my grandma, and you know, she was like my support, everything, so I try to be that way for my kids. Try to help them, support them [in] whatever they're trying to do." Alicia's dedication to childrearing, and her own history of better nurturing, are evident in her children's development: they are lively, curious, and alert.

The parenting behavior of the respondents in the derailed group is highly troubling. The fact that most of the respondents in both groups are their children's primary, if not exclusive, caregiver does not bode well for the children being raised by less competent mothers, who can provide little intellectual/linguistic and social stimulation. A number of mothers in the derailed group demonstrated very needy and immature behavior in relation to their children; some are competitive with them. One young woman described her experience in New Chance: "Another thing I liked about it [the program] . . . at Christmas they gave out gifts to the kids and I was sat on Santa's lap." The caregiving environment a parent creates for her child serves either as a vehicle for breaking the cycle of disadvantage or for transmitting and perpetuating it across generations.

The Detoured

The young women who have been detoured have good intellectual potential and other personal strengths and competencies but are also burdened and held back by psychological barriers to achievement. These barriers work against a young woman's doing what is necessary to move ahead and make lasting, positive changes in her life. They are manifested in self-sabotaging behavior patterns—that is, patterns that cause her to give up too quickly, or that prevent her from fully using what New

Chance offers to make gains and maintain them. An additional obstacle is the unpredictability of being embroiled in a crisis-ridden or self-destructive relationship with a troubled or inadequate man who relies on her and on whom she, in turn, is emotionally dependent.

Although they do have ambition, so far these young women have not had the guidance, encouragement, and strong, consistent supports necessary to realize it. And although they yearn to do better, to achieve more, and to be people they and others will admire, their environments frequently provide neither sustained exposure to role models of alternate ways of doing and being nor multiple and reinforced messages that it is good to do well.

There is considerable variation within this group: some young mothers display greater strengths and interests in the domains of school or work, while others focus more on their role as parents. For example, although there are many similarities between the half-sisters Lucia and Alicia, there are important differences as well. Alicia is happy to stay home and raise her children for the time being; she has no immediate plans to return to school or work until her preschool-age children are older. She likes mothering and has no clear vocational direction at the moment: "I volunteer [at her child's Head Start program]. They ask for a volunteer once a month. I usually volunteer more than that and bring projects home to cut out and stuff for the kids." By contrast, Lucia is pregnant with her third child, a pregnancy that she says is planned. More ambitious, focused, and enthusiastic about work than Alicia, she is going back to school and is determined to get her GED before this child is born: "I'm tired of being in here, and this is all I see all day is in here."

The profiles of Donna and Rhonda illustrate some of the critical themes and issues in the backgrounds and current experiences of members of this group.

Responsible and Competent: Donna

Donna has one child. She lives with her child and her brother in a sparsely furnished but pleasant and well-kept apartment. Her child's father is in jail for assault and battery, forgery, and parole violation. He was also physically abusive to her when they were together, and she seems, after many tries, finally to have detached herself from him.

> Every time we've talked on the phone, he's asked me to take him back, and I tell him no. I tell him I'm much happier without you. . . . Two years being apart from you has helped me realize that I'm a better person without you. I am smart, and I am getting on with my life.

After being in New Chance for approximately eight months, Donna left because her life was threatened by another young woman in the program, and moved from the area for a time: "The boyfriend she had was like a gangster type, and he threatened me, too . . . to kill me." Although she has not worked since New Chance, she is now enrolled in another program and has one more test to take for her GED. After getting it, she plans to start some kind of training program:

> Well, it's between two occupations—either a probation officer or a dental assistant. . . . My mom's always reminding me. She goes, "Welfare cuts are

> happening too much, you know. . . . This new President [Clinton] is gonna wipe out welfare completely, so you gotta get on the ball and keep working, hurry up and finish school." I know it's true.

Although Donna is in some ways socially isolated, she is also self-assured and, most important, willing to take personal responsibility for her actions:

> I did go to business college. . . . And I was almost finished. I blew that one. I only had three months left and that was at the time I was pregnant, too, and I ended up moving out to Tucson, Arizona. I was supposed to transfer to the college out there . . . but I never got around to it.

Donna is able to assume the personal responsibility so important to self-efficacy: "I feel there's nobody in this world that can help you except yourself. You are what you make your life to be." She also learns by observing and emulating others who are successful:

> My cousin Janice's sister is a medical assistant. I'm really proud of her, she's moved up so much. She has two daughters and she's working really hard now. She's making like nine something an hour. She started off at six dollars; she's really doing good.

And she is confident that she can succeed as well:

> I love working with people. All my jobs before I got pregnant, I've always worked in retail, always worked with people. Office jobs, you know, I've always loved working with people, so I know I could do something like that, like dental assistant or medical assistant or probation officer. . . . I'm a very well-functioning human being. I feel like I could do anything.

Such confidence is another manifestation of her sense of self-efficacy.

Donna is a competent, confident mother. Her child, who attends the licensed daycare center on the campus where Donna attends school, seems happy, well cared for, and bright:

> I'm always there for her. . . . Every night before we go to bed, I help her learn her ABCs or to count, or I try to teach her new words. . . . Every word we say, she repeats. So, she's at that stage where she's picking up on everything. We go to bed at the same time [every day]. . . . I have her on a schedule. Take a bath at a certain time, things like that. Other than that, I let her pretty much be her own person.

Donna made good use of the New Chance parenting class and continues to use what she has learned in her childrearing behavior and relationship to her child:

> It taught me a lot of things, how to be with my child, how to use the correct way, maybe, to discipline your child in a different way. Things that I've never heard of. . . . You learn new ideas. . . . I sit her down in a chair now instead of spanking her, you know, with my hand or something. I found that sitting her in

> the chair and taking away her favorite toys and stuff. . . . We call it a "time out," and me and my brother are both working on that.

Donna's life presents a mixed picture. She was, by her own admission, very troubled when she was younger. Although her mother is now happily married for the second time, she was in a violent relationship with Donna's father when their daughter was growing up. It also took Donna a long time to break her ties to her daughter's father, another violent man:

> I left him because he used to hit on me. He was very abusive physically and mentally with me. I could not stand to live that life. I didn't want my daughter growing up in that kind of environment. I went through that as a little girl, seeing my parents fight and argue and my mom being beat up on. I never thought in the longest time that would happen to me, but it happens. . . . For a while there, I thought I deserved it. It got to the point where I was just actually getting numb to it and getting used to it and thinking, you know . . . he was putting things in my head and telling me I was stupid and that nobody else was ever going to want me if I left him. Just all those manipulating lies. . . . It was hard [leaving him]. The first time I left him was when [her daughter] was five months old. . . . And then me and her father were talking again, and me being the dumb person, I guess, and soft-hearted person that I am, I gave him another chance to be a family again. . . . He promised that he wouldn't hit me again. A lot of people warned me that was just talk. But I didn't want to listen because I still had feelings for him at that time. So I went back like a fool—and, sure enough, not even a month later things went back to the same. Actually, they were worse. So, to me, men that are like that—I personally don't think they ever change. No matter what. I don't care if they get therapy. Those men do not ever change.

Donna is still very vulnerable in terms of men—preoccupied with her love relationships. She read aloud a series of love poems to the men in her life, each telling them how her life is nothing without them. One begins:

> Not having you in my life is almost like
> someone has taken all the air out of me,
> and I can't breathe.

Finally, although Donna is confident that she can succeed in the world of work, her appearance may work against her with potential employers, especially ones with conventional ideas about such things. Tall, statuesque, and attractive, she wears five studs in her ears and a tattoo on her upper arm, and her flamboyant style of dress seems designed to "make a statement" and call attention to herself.

Increasing Maturity: Rhonda

Rhonda was pregnant with her third child at the time of the interview. She lives with her children, mother, brother, and youngest sister in a comfortable house rented by her mother—a house that has a basement playroom full of toys for her children. She gets considerable support from her family, especially from her mother.

Her children's father lives nearby in a rented room. He has a high school diploma, went to the Job Corps, and then worked for a moving company; he currently works at a fast-food restaurant as a cook and cashier. He sees the children every day and babysits as well:

> He helps me. He buys them shoes, clothes, when they need stuff. And when she [her daughter] was on Pampers, he used to buy her Pampers. . . . When they need things and he's got the money, he gets it for them. . . . He has plans; we have plans together. We have plans to get a house for me and him and the kids, and he has a plan to go to a factory to get a much better job. So when we get this house, we can pay all the bills and still afford things in the house.

Rhonda was in New Chance for a year and nine months. She attended regularly but left before getting her GED:

> I had went to sign up for my GED [test], I was supposed to went and took it, but my daughter took sick, and I never went and took the test. She had a seizure [from a high fever], and she had to be hospitalized. . . . She was in the hospital, and I had missed so many days, so I had to get dropped from the program because I had missed so many days and months being with her.

Rhonda says she wanted to go back to New Chance, and the program staff member called her repeatedly: "She'd call me like every other two weeks and ask me whether I was coming back, and I was telling her yeah, I didn't know when, but I was gonna come back." When Rhonda finally did go back, after a three-month absence, she felt she had missed too much and dropped out for good. She currently attends another GED program at a church, but has not yet taken the test. After she does, she plans to work part-time,

> Like in nursing homes working with older people, and working with younger kids at pre-schools. I worked there recently [through the Summer Youth Employment Program, in which she had participated over the past four or five years]. I'd rather work at something like that, 'cause I've got experience in doing things like that.

Rhonda views New Chance as a force for positive change in her life, promoting her personal development as well as her development as a parent. For Rhonda, personhood and parenthood are closely intertwined:

> It changed me a lot because when I first came, I used to act silly and laugh and giggle at everything. . . . And they slowed me down and settled me down to sit down and realize that I got two kids to look out for, 'cause, you know, I was real wild. I used to, like, jump the hoop, get up, go do everything. They settled me down, by them talking to us, letting us know that I'm getting to be an adult, not a little child no more. They helped me a lot. . . . If I was designing my own program, I would like for the mothers to bring their kids with them, so we could have a mother-kid program. . . . Like it would be a teacher for the kids and a teacher for the mothers. And then, almost to the end of the day, they bring us all

> together. And all of us sit down and talk about things and do things with the kids. Sitting in a circle and talking about things.

Rhonda is a concerned and caring mother, interested in fostering her children's sense of self-competence:

> We do a lot of things together, me and them. . . . We make stuff together like when they do their lunch and I let them make their own sandwiches . . . and I let them pour their milk in their cups. I let them set their own table. . . . Like they got six drawers apiece on the dresser and I got them a socks drawer, and they know which drawer is theirs, so they go in the drawer and get their clothes. I tell them to get out socks and, like, a tee shirt and they bring me their clothes. I enjoy being with them.

She was asked what she thought was most important for a program for young mothers to focus on: "Let me see, . . . I say work and parenting." Thus, although she currently defines herself primarily as a mother, she believes in the New Chance definition of that role as a "working mother."

Like Donna, however, Rhonda presents a mixed picture. On more than one occasion, she has held herself back by getting pregnant on the brink of achieving something important.[2] For example, when she became pregnant with her second child she dropped out of high school, disappointing her mother, who was counting on her finishing. Like Donna, Rhonda recognizes and takes responsibility for the part her own actions have played in this scenario:

> I was in my senior year. I was short two credits, that's it. Two. That was a big disappointment to my mother, too. . . . I already had my older daughter. I stayed at school, and I had her. My mother was keeping her while I was going to school. And then I got pregnant again, so I just got lazy. Instead of having one child, and then I got pregnant again, and I got so lazy and so, I just don't know what happened, I just didn't want to go no more. . . . Me and her [her mother] made an agreement. If I had a baby [instead of an abortion], she'll keep the baby while I go back to school. . . . So I went back to school 'cause she kept the baby. So then, when I got pregnant again, I was so afraid of telling her 'cause I knew she was going to be upset. "You're pregnant again? You're still in school. You got this baby, and now I got to keep both these kids? What are you going to do now?" So I just took it upon myself to stop. . . . I felt down on myself. She was so up [referring to how her mother felt], "My daughter is still going to school even though she has a baby, she's trying to do something." And then I went and got pregnant again, that just dropped everything in me. I just felt so bad, and she was so excited 'cause I was still going to school and it was almost time to graduate. We were taking our pictures and everything.

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[2] The researcher, who has observed this behavior repeatedly among participants in young parent programs, uses the term "failure at the moment of potential growth" to describe this phenomenon (Musick, 1993a).

Now, back in school to get her GED, she is pregnant for the third time and had not been using any kind of birth control: "This wasn't planned neither. It happened. It just happened." She does not mind being pregnant now but plans to have no more children: "After this one I asked my doctor could he tie my tubes for me."

Young Mothers as Caretakers

Although none of the young women in this group are presently employed, some have full-time occupations as the skilled and steady "kin-keepers" at the core of their families. Still in their early twenties, several of these young women are already holding their families together, fulfilling essential roles that in past generations were carried out by the older women (and men) of the family. One young woman, for example, cares for her sister's children so that she can finish school, and also takes good care of her own and finds the time to be a school volunteer. Another young woman was responsible for getting her partner, the father of her three children, to stop drinking and taking drugs and to put his life back on course.

> It took a lot to get him out of drinking. He was doing really bad, drinking every day. It was hard for me to take him away from his friends, but it wasn't because of me, it was because he needed to be away from them, he needed that chance to grow out of that, 'cause I think his friends really messed him up a lot. Before, he had a really good job . . . working at the hotel and stuff, and as soon as he hooked up with one of his friends, that was it. He didn't care about working. He just . . . all the drugs and stuff like that. That's not the way to go.

Still another respondent serves as the substitute mother for her cousin's nine- and eleven-year-old "problem children": "They feel they can call when they have just the slightest problem. They can argue over juice or something in the refrigerator, and they call."

It is ironic, but not unexpected, that the most capable and caring young women are often those most burdened (and diverted from fulfilling their potential) by unceasing demands. They are often those most likely to be put upon by friends and family and partners within their putative "support system," by people who are takers, rather than givers, who are covert or overt obstructionists.

In an environment where there are many risks and few opportunities and supports, the raising of healthy, competent children is an indispensable and critical function. These young women instill interpersonal skills and positive values that enable their children to develop well in the midst of poverty. By serving as buffers between a threatening world and their young and vulnerable children, they prevent external chaos from twisting their children's lives and thwarting their development. In general, the children of mothers in this group of detoured women were doing much better than those of mothers who have been derailed; many seemed happy and bright, at least for the present in their preschool and early school years. One mother, whose kindergartner was on the honor roll, said, "I teach them a lot about things that go on out there in the world. I have real good communication. We can talk to each other about anything. They can ask me questions, and I answer them."

Most of the young mothers in this group seemed to be consciously trying to raise their children better than they had been raised themselves. A number commented on how the parenting classes at the New Chance site had been especially meaningful for them, and were able to give specific examples of how it had helped them as mothers.

It is possible that the young mothers in this group will some day be able to handle the joint responsibilities of parenthood and full-time employment, but this achievement will require both greater maturity and more external supports than they have at present. For such young women to accomplish school and work goals the first time around, much more assistance is required than is apt to be provided by the average program for young mothers. Few programs are set up to offer the kind of intensive, developmentally and clinically grounded services that such young women need to break out—and to stay out—of self-defeating behavior patterns while they are still in their late adolescent and early-adult years.

Additionally, if such young women are to succeed the first time around, they need some combination of the following supports: greater stability in their living arrangements; better, more reliable child care; encouragement (or, at least, not active discouragement) from a competent, caring partner; sustained emotional, if not financial, support from family members, at least until they complete school or work training; and, for those from especially troubled families, some form of therapy or counseling. In order to succeed, a young woman need not have all of these supports, but only those that are most absent in her life. If cumulative risks have a negative effect on outcomes—that is, if young people with fewer personal and social resources and greater deficits and deprivations are more vulnerable and function less well as students and workers and parents—the reverse is equally true. The more protective factors a young woman can draw on, both within herself and within the interpersonal matrix that surrounds her, the greater her resilience in the face of challenges and adversity.[3]

The Derailed

Young women in the derailed group have not only more severe family problems than do the detoured, but also less intellectual potential and resilience and fewer interpersonal skills. These girls were having problems in school long before they became teenage mothers. They seem socially isolated, naive, and markedly limited in several domains. Some have never been more than a few miles from their home. The young women in this group, almost without exception, manifest poor self-worth and self-efficacy in their lack of perseverance and single-mindedness on their own behalf. Like Elda and Gilda, they tend to give up easily, allowing themselves to drift or be pulled off track.

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[3] For theoretical discussions of mechanisms underlying risk and resilience, see, for example, Rutter, 1987.

Social Isolation: Elda

Elda has one child. She lives with her child and her mother, a woman who has been on public assistance for many years, in a rent-subsidized house. Two brothers also live in the house. Elda was in New Chance for "a couple of months, I think. I can't remember, really." After leaving the program, she worked as a bakery assistant in a grocery store, but earned only a hundred dollars every two weeks because "they wouldn't give me no hours." Before that, she worked in a gas station but left: "I got tired of the employees. I got fed up one day and left." Elda dropped out of high school at age 14 and never wanted to go back: "I just didn't want to go. I'd rather stay home and go out with my friends and stuff. That's about it." The school tried, without success, to get her back: "I was always going to court, and it was just pretty bad. I don't want to talk about it." After New Chance, she went to another program at a junior college for a few weeks; then "I just left them." Now she is signed up to take the test for a GED. After she gets the GED, she says, "I want to take a couple of classes in college. I'm not sure for what, but I don't know, something. Typing or something."

Her child's father is at a nearby community college: "First he went to go for a doctor. Then he changed it, he's gonna be a nurse, and he's not sure yet, or a photographer." She wavers about whether she wants any other children ("Well maybe like six, seven years down the line, but I don't know, maybe not"), but says she is only "sort of" practicing birth control since she and her boyfriend have relations infrequently.

When asked if the New Chance parenting classes had been useful, Elda responded that they had taught her a lot of things she had not known, but, "I don't usually use none of the stuff." Later when discussing her child's pneumonia at three months old, she remarked, "The doctor said they usually get it at that age." Elda shows virtually no emotion, either positive or negative, presenting a markedly flat affect, with a blank and distant expression on her face and a soft and uninflected voice. She looks depressed, but her behavior indicates more than depression. Her answers are vague; her mind seems to be someplace else, and her descriptions of all her relationships—with her mother, her daughter, her brothers, and her boyfriend—have a muted feeling tone. Her lack of purpose extends to parenting as well as work: for example, she complained that her daughter "forces me to read her books."

Elda and her family are reminiscent of the poor Appalachian families of the 1930s that James Agee wrote about in *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*: extremely socially isolated, withdrawn, and depressed-looking. Elda's mother, who is in her 40s, looks to be in her late 60s—a woman who has lived through rough times. Again, as in several instances in this study, the neighborhood looks working-class, but inside the front door lies another world—bare and beat up, with a pane missing in the front-door window and little furniture. Elda's mother has had three children by three different fathers, has never really worked, cannot drive a car, and has been on public assistance for most of her life.

Strong-Willed and Troubling: Gilda

Like Elda, Gilda lives in what appears to be a working-class neighborhood, but the house is small, messy, and cluttered. Many people of all ages, in addition to her own two children, live there with her, including four other young children: Gilda's sister Cherelle's daughter, who looks to be about eight or nine, a couple of three-year-olds, and a four-year-old. During the interview, no more than 60 to 90 seconds ever elapsed without someone coming in and interrupting. At various times, five men walked in and out, some of whom were her brothers who also live there. Then Gilda's grandmother, a sweet elderly woman, came into the living room carrying Gilda's baby, to tell her about something cute the baby had just done. Her bathrobe was wide open, revealing that she was nude beneath it. Another elderly woman, whom Gilda identified as a "godmother," also appeared. Then her sister came in and talked for quite a long time. There is also a stepfather, but he wasn't at home.

Gilda was in New Chance for a year and three months. She says that she wants to return to get her GED, but at another program because she is too old for New Chance. However, she did not know the name or location of the program, nor when she would do this. She has not been in any other program, except for a cosmetology course that she quit because she was pregnant, and "the [cosmetic] chemicals were too strong for me." She plans to "finish cosmetology and then go to the state board and get my license. . . . I just like doing hair. . . . My mom and dad got a license for it. . . . I sit at home and do hair. . . . nails, all that."

It was Gilda and her boyfriend who threatened the life of the detoured mother Donna, causing the latter to move across town and ultimately to flee to her parents' house in another part of the state. According to Donna, Gilda's boyfriend committed a robbery. Gilda did not want anybody to know about it, so she said to Donna, who was then her roommate, "If you tell anybody, I'll kill you." Gilda, an articulate young woman, has some trouble telling the truth. For example, her version of the episode with Donna is:

> I had my own apartment, and I let one of the girls from the school stay there, and she got on my nerves . . . because she didn't like to do anything. She wouldn't cook for her kids [Donna has only one child], she wouldn't clean up behind herself, nothing. And I got tired of it. And her daughter was a whiner.

Gilda also told the interviewer that her father is a police officer; in reality, her stepfather is a security guard.

Although Gilda said she had not minded signing the paper whereby she promised not to get pregnant while in the program, she then contradicted herself: "I think they shouldn't tell the teenagers, 'No you cannot have a kid while you're in this program.' . . . I'm going to do what I want to do anyway, 'cause I'm grown."

Most worrisome is her relationship with her three-month-old baby, with whom she interacts immaturely and inappropriately. She said that she liked to call her "ugly": "When I tell her that, she pokes out her lip, and I like to see her poke out her lip." When asked what her baby's father did, she responded, "Nothing. Lousy bum. She [the baby, who was sitting in a swinging chair nearby] gets offended when I talk about her dad." Later Gilda said that men just give her a headache: "You know I'm talking about your Daddy, too. He gives me headaches, too." Later she admitted that she did not deal with her children's noisiness as the parenting class suggested, but rather told them to "shut up." Fortunately for her children, there are several warm and mature older women in the family who may serve as alternate caregivers and counteract Gilda's influence.

Home Lives

There were substantial differences between the abstract notion of motherhood and the real experiences some of these young women provide for their children from day to day, between what they said and what they were observed actually to do. The home visits revealed up close the physical context of the lives of these young women and their children—a context that was often markedly unconducive to upward mobility and healthy child development, as in the homes of Jenny and Tracey.

Jenny has two children but relinquished her second child for adoption at birth. She is clearly overwhelmed by the tasks of motherhood. During the interview, her two-and-a-half-year-old son repeatedly threw and banged toys, including a heavy toy truck. The house furnishings made no allowance for a toddler's safety: the little boy repeatedly climbed on a large unit that was leaning against but not attached to the wall, and nearly pulled it over on himself. He shrieked, hit his mother, and pulled the interviewer's hair. Jenny was confused and exasperated by her son's behavior, and said that she had given up her daughter for adoption because "I've been struggling so much with *him*."

Tracey repeatedly told the interviewer that she adored her five children. But every time one came up to her, she swiftly raised her hand as if to warn: "I'm going to smack your face!" Although she did talk sweet baby talk to her newest baby, she automatically raised her hand to two of her older children every time they came near her. And her four-year-old son wrapped a belt around his hand in a practiced way and began to beat his younger sister—thus indicating that it was not uncommon for the children to be punished in that way in Tracey's family.

The homes of the respondents in this group reflected underlying disorder and family dysfunction. Whereas the young women in the detoured group were all poor, their surroundings were generally neat and clean, childrens' drawings were on the refrigerator door, and toys (sometimes homemade) were in evidence. The homes of respondents in the derailed group were impoverished in every sense of the word: disorganized, barren, or littered with odds and ends of junk, and lacking any suitable playthings. The interiors of the houses strikingly resembled one another: no sign of individuality in the heaped-up bags of garbage, or in the furniture consisting of one beat-up chair, one beat-up couch, and a TV. Many people, including young children, live together in such cramped and often filthy houses.

The lives of some of these derailed young women are full of conflict and unpredictable. For example, a young mother and her two-year-old son lived in a three-room apartment with her ex-partner (the father of her child, but not her current boyfriend), his mother, and his mother's boyfriend. At one time, there was also a "roomer," but he had been kicked out for not paying his rent. The researcher, arriving at the house, was greeted by this sign on the door:

> DIABLO! Go away. Go to Hell. You are not welcome here. Go sleep in your 1972 Monterey. Thanks to you, we are being evicted. Screw you [a euphemism for the actual term].
>
> Hate,
> Len, Lori, Jenny, George, and George Jr.

Tragically, these young women are—not necessarily by design but by default—shaping their children's lives into mirror images of their own. In those homes—where there is neither book nor toy; where there is no routine, with meals not being served nor children being put to bed at regular times; and where baby bottles are full of soda—the children are woebegone, dirty, and neglected-looking. Even in nice weather, these young women appear rarely to leave the house or take their children anywhere. Asked how they spend their time, several mothers said they just "hang out" all day with their children; the latter wander around or sit and watch TV. When asked what they felt they did well as mothers, several young women responded concretely, "I feed them."

Where there is little organization or structure in the environment, cycles of family pathology and inadequacy are passed from generation to generation, unnoticed and unbroken. Lacking strong cognitive skills, as well as a sturdy sense of self, respondents in this group have been undone by each new challenge. Overwhelmed by crises—some which they may have unwittingly precipitated—they are defeated. Not only do they give up on difficult or inconvenient tasks, but they fail to model an organized approach to life for their children. And their children never get on the track at all. Thus, disorganization, uncontrolled, takes on a life of its own within the family and becomes a permanent fixture, one transmitted down the generations.

Structure, especially time structure, organizes and socializes children, enabling them to function and succeed in the world beyond the home—first in school and later in the wider world. Children who come to school unused to being governed by time are doubly handicapped: not only do they have trouble following a schedule and rules, maintaining and focusing attention, and making the daily transitions from one activity to the next, but their teachers judge and label them for their failure.[4]

Living arrangements also reflect organization. Not only do the derailed mothers and their children move around a great deal owing to personal problems (others' as well as their own), but their living conditions foster neither study nor childrearing. Not only are these homes cramped and cluttered, but—equally disturbing—they are noisy and interpersonally invasive: people seem to live in each other's face, with no domain of privacy for either mother or child. A forthcoming study of parental correlates of school success in young children[5] found that low-income parents whose five- and six-year-old children were identified by their teachers as being prepared for school entry and doing well in their academic work understood the need for a home environment conducive to quiet learning. These parents also set rules in their homes and expect their children to help maintain that order. Furthermore, they have structured their home environment and their children's lives to make them favorable to development and learning from the earliest weeks and months of life. This instilling of order brings structure to the young child's life—a structure that can be internalized and act as an antidote to the disorder and chaos that surrounds these children in their communities. Rhonda and Donna provide this for their children; Elda and Gilda do not.

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[4] Teachers can be very harsh in their assessments of children who have difficulty following the time- and space-governed rules of the classroom, and may stigmatize them from the moment they first enter school (Musick, 1993b).

[5] Hans, Musick, and Jagers, in press.

As for the program implications for young women in this group, early intervention for the children seems as important as intervention aimed at their mothers—and is, realistically, much more likely to be successful. The New Chance program model does not heavily focus on parenting per se, and weekly child development or parent education classes appeared to have minimal effects on young women in this group, although the detoured ones seemed to enjoy and benefit from them. In the derailed group, several did not recall attending parenting classes at all.

Welfare-to-work initiatives that intend to recruit women living in disorganized, multiproblem environments harmful to children, must incorporate developmental—in many cases, ameliorative—early-childhood programs for the children in these families. If they do not, such a mother will pass her family's pathology on to her offspring. Parent education is not—by itself—sufficient to prevent developmental problems in children being raised in a disorganized, dysfunctional family. Parenting is a relationship; it is not a skill that can be taught as one teaches a person to drive a car or use a computer. The critical elements of parenting—those that determine child development—are based not simply on what one knows, but on who one is.

While these less competent young mothers can certainly be helped to acquire meaningful skills and do productive work, that training and work may require a setting that is highly supportive and minimally stressful, at least during the initial phases.

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In order to make an appreciably better life for herself and her children, a young woman in the pre-GED group—coming from a dysfunctional home and family—must be strong enough to risk the loss of much that is known and comfortable. The new sense of power that accompanies new skills and the discovery that she has a mind of her own is unsettling, especially if she feels an urge to act and alter her life course. Such change threatens to estrange such a young woman from many, if not all, of her significant others and from her image of herself—who she has so far known herself to be. Not only would this young woman be symbolically saying to female kin and friends, "I want a life that will be different (and better) than yours," she may well be giving up the chance for love and marriage. For a poor young woman—especially one of an ethnic minority—the cost of success is often to price herself out of a marital partner.

This earth-shaking transformation—taking possession of one's own mind and life, of one's own destiny—requires a full complement of skills and strengths. Although it is possible that some of the detoured young women will eventually make and maintain such a transformation, they will in the process need considerable help, as well as considerable drive. To have any hope of getting back on the track and succeeding in this enterprise, the derailed young women would require much more intensive and sustained intervention, in addition to employment possibilities suited to their skills and motivations. And, for the countless young women who are too depressed or too apathetic or too lost to enroll in a program such as New Chance, seeking and sustaining such transformation would require a miracle.

Part IV

Chapter 8

Summary and Conclusions

Almost to a woman, the participants in this study were enthusiastic about their experience in the New Chance program. Both young women who achieved their GED through the program and those who did not evaluated the program positively.

Such favorable reviews notwithstanding, this report is, again, by no means the final, or even the interim, story on whether New Chance "works." Preliminary findings on the program's short-term effectiveness, based on a careful study involving the random assignment of more than 2,000 young mothers to treatment and control groups, will be published in 1994; and the longer-term impact will be reported in 1996. Rather, this in-depth study of the various directions that a small sample of 50 New Chance enrollees have taken since leaving the program and the progress they have made toward achieving economic self-sufficiency and better lives for themselves and their children will, it is hoped, provide a context for the impact analysis. It may also illustrate some of the dilemmas that face many disadvantaged young mothers, not just New Chance participants, in their struggle for economic independence. To this end, this chapter both reviews the study's key findings and then suggests lessons and possible directions for research, programs, and policies that arise from these findings.

The Key Findings

The key findings of this study concern the heterogeneity of the young women, their slow progress toward self-sufficiency, and the salience of family members and partners in their lives. A principal theme is that the young mothers' education- and employment-related strivings and achievements are intricately interwoven with their interpersonal issues and needs. Who these young women are and what they hope to be are deeply embedded in their interpersonal context—the families in which they were raised and the people who are now significant to them.

Heterogeneity

- **The label "young welfare mothers who are high school dropouts" covers a group whose members vary considerably in their economic and personal assets.**

Some study subjects came from long-term welfare families; others from working-class households. Some had pleasant, comfortable places to live; others lived in near-destitution. The lives of some were generally stable; from time to time, others were poised on the brink of calamity.

The study subjects brought to New Chance, as to their subsequent experiences, a range of capabilities, aptitudes, and aspirations that shaped their view of the world and their degree of motivation to succeed. The women differed, too, in the degree of psychological and practical support they received from family members, partners, and friends.

- **While there are differences between those in the GED and the pre-GED groups, the variation within each group is equally striking.**

The young women who earned a GED in New Chance appeared more advantaged than those who did not when both groups of women first entered the program. The GED earners' educational backgrounds were stronger, and their families of origin appeared less economically needy and more supportive; the GED earners also expressed greater interest in work outside the home.

However, the variation among women in each group is as pronounced as these between-group differences. Indeed, the fact that some young women classified as belonging to the pre-GED group eventually did attain this credential indicates the permeability of the boundary between the groups and the potential for overlap.

- **After leaving the New Chance site, the large majority of study subjects did something to move toward economic independence but differed in the nature and intensity of such activity.**

Forty-seven of the 50 young women interviewed engaged in at least one and often several activities that could potentially advance them toward self-sufficiency: attending other GED classes, vocational training, or community college; working; and volunteering in their children's schools. The extent of their involvement varied considerably, however: participation in self-sufficiency-building activities was intermittent for many, continuous for a few. Three of the 50 respondents stayed at home with their children throughout the post-New Chance period.

Slow Progress Toward Self-Sufficiency

- **The majority of young women were still receiving AFDC at the time they were interviewed, which averaged two and a half years after their entry into New Chance. Most of the young women—both those who appeared to have advanced further toward self-sufficiency and those who had made less progress—experienced both advances and setbacks in the period after leaving New Chance.**

When interviewed, 41 of the 50 study subjects were either receiving AFDC or waiting to be reinstated on the welfare rolls. Some of the young women who were no longer on welfare were working; others were living with husbands or partners who were employed.

In the post-New Chance period, most study subjects had both stretches in the labor force or in school or training and months of disengagement from any human capital-building activity. A number of young women whose lives initially appeared to be on a downward course after they left New Chance had made significant strides in the months preceding the interview. Conversely, others, who had been off welfare after leaving New Chance, were back on it when they were interviewed.

Some of the young women who were receiving welfare at the time of the interview were relying on it for income support while they were attending college or a GED or skills training program. Others were working at low-wage jobs and collecting supplementary AFDC benefits. Some planned to work when their preschool-age children were older. And for some—those with the fewest skills and outside supports—lengthy spells on welfare seemed likely.

The young mothers' progress must be seen in light of the fact that most participated in New Chance on a voluntary basis. (Although the Family Support Act of 1988 allows a state to require an AFDC parent under the age 20 who lacks a high school diploma to attend school or a GED program, few states have done so.) Had the study subjects been required to participate as a condition of keeping their welfare grants (and many, though not all, of the New Chance program directors have said that they would favor a participation requirement as a means of securing better attendance), it seems likely that some of the young mothers might have advanced farther and with fewer delays, while others, mired in personal and situational problems, would have been cut off assistance. As volunteers, however, these young women may have been more motivated to make something of themselves than other young welfare mothers, also high school dropouts, who did not enroll in New Chance.

- **Job retention was a major issue for the young mothers.**

While 26 young women worked at some point after departing the program, for periods ranging from one month to over a year and a half, only nine were still working at the interview. Job retention was the exception rather than the rule owing in part to the attitudes and situational problems young women brought to the workplace (e.g., inability to deal with authority, pregnancy), and in part to the barriers the workplace presented (e.g., discrimination, poor supervision).

Other studies have also documented the problems young mothers face in getting and staying off welfare.[1] It appears that for this group, circulation on and off public assistance has been the norm, not the exception.

- **The majority of young women who began community college dropped out without completing it.**

While 20 young women entered community college, only seven were still enrolled when interviewed. Many of the others were overwhelmed by academic difficulties and the need to balance course work with family responsibilities. Several, too, were tripped up by regulations concerning the dropping of courses and the number of credits needed to receive financial assistance; they ended up with sizable debts to the college, which had to be paid off before they could take additional classes. Among those who remained enrolled, most were one or more semesters behind schedule in the programs they were attending because they had to repeat courses they had failed or dropped the first time around.

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[1] Using data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY), Pavetti (1992) followed 424 women who first received AFDC benefits when they were between 20 and 23 years old—an age similar to that of the young mothers in this study—five years after the start of their first welfare spell. She found that over this five-year period, 58 percent of all welfare spells experienced by high school graduates ended with a work exit, as did 40 percent of the welfare spells experienced by high school dropouts. However, 60 percent of the women who left welfare for work returned to public assistance, most often within the first year after leaving it. Moreover, most jobs appeared to be short-lived: only 25 percent of the high school graduates and 15 percent of the high school dropouts left welfare for a job that lasted 18 months or longer.

- **Both the cost and the availability of child care were major issues for respondents.**

Some viewed the high cost of care as constraining their employment options, forcing them to rule out low-paying jobs or to seek work on the evening or "graveyard" shifts, when relatives or friends could watch their children at little cost or for free. One respondent had to quit an evening job altogether when, with her regular babysitter on vacation, she could find no one else to care for her daughter.

- **Unplanned pregnancies and childbearing impeded the progress of a number of young women.**

Problems with the pill—and misunderstanding of how it works—were blamed for a number of unintended pregnancies. Many pregnancies occurred, however, when a young woman was experiencing disruptions in other areas of her life or was about to undertake a major transition (e.g., enrollment in college). Some young women, probably unconsciously, may have used pregnancy and childbearing as a way of avoiding new and potentially stressful situations.

- **Slow progress toward self-sufficiency did not indicate a preference for welfare over work.**

Most of the young women who worked believed that employment had left them better off economically. (Often they had been employed for less than a year and continued to receive supplemental welfare grants or other benefits, or were able to find free or inexpensive child care.) Many complained about their small welfare grants and the difficulty of stretching a check to last a month. Most respondents also recognized many non-economic benefits to be derived from being off aid: feelings of independence and greater self-esteem, and freedom from "hassles" and "put-downs" by welfare workers. Although the large majority of young women in the GED group justified their own receipt of public assistance as a regrettable but necessary and short-term expedient, they favored imposition of a work requirement for other AFDC recipients. The experiences of these young women in the workplace suggest the complexities of imposing work obligations on this group, as discussed below.

The Importance of Family and Partners

- **Economic and psychological support from family members and partners played a crucial role in the young women's lives.**

More fortunate young women were able to count on mothers and boyfriends for ongoing encouragement and concrete assistance—help with finances, a stable place to live, transportation, child care, and other material needs. In general, such young women were more likely to be resilient, motivated, and actively taking steps to improve their lives. Even so, many respondents' family members and partners were unable to provide them with guidance on employment and occupational choices because they themselves had spent large parts of their lives out of the labor market. Owing to the absence of occupational role models in their immediate environments, the study subjects' occupational horizons tended to be limited, as was their knowledge of workplace norms and mores.

Less fortunate young women had to deal with negative reactions from parents and partners—jealousy, only sporadic offers of material assistance, or active discouragement of their efforts to get ahead. Many study subjects received little or no help with child care—or anything else—from their mothers, who were themselves working, incapacitated, or geographically or emotionally distant from their daughters. Many of the men the young women chose were, like the women themselves, caught up in a cycle of poverty, discrimination, and various social ills, and rarely possessed the skills needed to get well-paying jobs. As a result of their own economic marginality, many New Chance participants' boyfriends felt threatened by the prospect of the young women's own advancement and tended to undermine their partners' progress.[2]

- **Growing up in an especially disorganized family had lasting negative consequences for a number of young women in the study sample.**

Several study subjects grew up in exceptionally disorganized and dysfunctional homes headed by mothers who had fallen victim to drugs and alcohol, or were so besieged by their own problems that they were unable to be loving, attentive parents. In terms of developmental theory, these young women are at a disadvantage in meeting the complex challenges involved in the transition from adolescence to adulthood. Often, they are still seeking answers to fundamental, unresolved psychological issues of childhood: Who cares for me? Whom can I trust? Who will stand by me? Yet, at the same time, they must grapple with the identity-related issues of adolescence: Who am I? What do I want to do and be? The conflict between these two sets of issues too often leads these women to pursue courses of action that, from the point of view of achieving self-sufficiency, seem self-sabotaging, such as leaving a job at a boyfriend's behest or becoming pregnant in an effort to secure his lasting affection.

- **Just as there are important differences in the family backgrounds of the study participants, there is also significant variation in the way the young mothers are raising their own children.**

The majority of the study subjects appeared to be affectionate and competent parents. Some, however, had difficulty coping with their children and were competitive with them. And in the worst cases, young women were rearing their children in environments notable for their physical disorder and for their lack both of linguistic and cognitive stimulation and of structure and routine. These harmful contexts only transmit and perpetuate the cycle of disadvantage across generations.

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[2] One of the authors, Joyce Ladner, has observed that a broken romance can diminish the coping capacity of young mothers similar to those in this study. She has seen them lash out at their young children and neglect both their children's and their own needs when they were having difficulty with their partners.

Ladner also recalls her conversation with a teenage mother in Washington, D.C., who, when asked why her baby's father did not provide child support, replied, "Tyrone, he can't help his own self." On the subject of fathers being able to be the principal support of their children, another teenage mother said simply, "You can't give what you don't have."

Implications and Recommendations

These findings give rise to a number of lessons and recommendations for researchers, program practitioners, and policymakers.

Implications for Research

One lesson emerging from this study appears incontrovertible:

- **The importance of judging the effectiveness of program interventions in the lives of this population over a period of years.**

The unstable nature of the young women's lives—the fact that their progress was uneven and susceptible to reversal—confirms the need for long-term evaluation of the effects of programs like New Chance that seek to promote self-sufficiency among adolescents by increasing their human capital.[3] It takes time to complete human capital-developing activities (e.g., GED classes, college, and vocational training), and even longer for those whose academic skills are relatively low to begin with and who are contending with other problems. Then it takes additional time to parlay completion of these activities into better-paying jobs.

In addition, New Chance participants have not yet completed the journey between adolescence and adulthood. Adolescence is a period in human development when individuals in this society are expected to engage in the quest to define who they are and who they wish to be in the future. Adolescence is also a process during which young people may try on different roles and personas as they seek to discover their identities, values and attitudes, life styles and goals. The perceptions, self-evaluations, and behaviors of the study subjects are likely to continue to change as they learn from their experiences and gain greater maturity and insight. It is possible that many New Chance participants (like youths served by other social programs) will be better able to assimilate the program's messages and to integrate them into their daily lives once they have attained a relatively stable sense of who they are and the direction in which they want to proceed.[4]

Implications for Programs

From the findings of this study can be drawn several implications and recommendations for strengthening programs for young mothers. Some of these implications and recommendations are tentative but merit further examination and testing.

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[3] As noted in Chapter 1, the New Chance impact analysis will examine the program's impact through 18 and 42 months after random assignment into the treatment and control groups.

[4] A longitudinal study of low-income black women who first gave birth as teenagers (Furstenberg, Brooks-Gunn, and Morgan, 1987) indicated substantial variation in their long-term outcomes. Seventeen years after their first child was born, two thirds of the young mothers in the study were employed, half had incomes above the poverty line, and two thirds had not received welfare during the previous five years.

- **The importance of intervention by helping adults.**

Much has been written about the crucial importance of staff in programs serving disadvantaged youth. This study helps make clear why helping adults are vital to these programs: they function, at least in part, as surrogate parents, assisting youths with the transition to adulthood in ways the youths' own parents have been unable to. Staff members play varying roles, depending on the needs of individual participants. Some participants need advice in exploring the pros and cons of various occupational options, along with encouragement in pursuing a chosen field. Others need to hear, and to hear repeatedly, that their efforts will ultimately pay off, especially when success seems a long time in coming. Still others need the most fundamental kind of reassurance: that they are lovable and worthy human beings who deserve good things in their lives. And, of course, some young people need all of the above.

- **The importance of skilled and trained staff.**

The study suggests that staff members will be more effective in their work if they have a solid understanding of human and adolescent development. To help a young woman move forward, it may be essential to help her look back, to confront the sometimes painful circumstances and events of her earlier life that may be continuing to shape her behavior in unproductive ways. This task requires a bond of trust between participant and staff member. It is also requires that the staff member be versed in basic counseling skills—able to sense when the participant is ready for self-disclosure, when to press a point and when to hold back. Not least, the staff member must be able to recognize when a participant's problems are beyond his or her expertise and require professional counseling.

- **The importance of preparing young people for the culture of the workplace—and for discrimination.**

Although programs that seek to prepare young people for employment often focus on helping them find jobs, this study suggests the need for an equal focus on job retention. Few study subjects lost a job because they were unable to do the work; rather, a number quit or were fired because they were unfamiliar with, and resentful of, the hierarchical structure of the workplace. Through role plays, presentations by outside speakers, ongoing counseling, and other techniques, programs can help participants understand the principles that govern most work settings, such as delegation of authority and differential responsibilities and perquisites.

Blind acceptance of authority is not the aim of such instruction. The study suggests that a number of young women were, in fact, poorly supervised. But knowledge of workplace norms gives young people a realistic perspective from which to judge their own behavior and that of others.

Racial and ethnic discrimination, which figured prominently in the workplace experiences of a small but significant number of respondents, is another issue that youth-employment programs must address. Employers may also discriminate against workers who do not use standard English. Programs can emphasize the use of standard English in work situations and point out the advantages of being able to switch linguistic codes with ease.

- **The importance of providing additional supports to college attenders.**

Additional supports are needed if more young welfare mothers are both to succeed in college and to secure the better-paying jobs to which a college diploma affords access. These supports include pre-college study skills classes and better counseling about appropriate courses and about college rules and regulations, especially when these regulations are tied to whether and how courses are paid for. In addition, supportive peer groups can help to make the college experience less isolating and more rewarding. At the same time, college rules and welfare policies should allow for the reality of the AFDC mothers' lives: that is, their conflicting responsibilities and other problems may keep them from progressing as quickly as other students.

A number of respondents in the study attended proprietary colleges or vocational schools. Some of these proprietary schools provided the young women with useful training and then helped them find jobs. Other schools appeared to exist principally for the purpose of extracting money from gullible young people while rendering as few services as possible. Youth programs should take it as an obligation to help young people assess a particular proprietary school in respect to how much value it provides for the money.

- **The importance of ongoing contraceptive counseling.**

The fact that many study participants became pregnant because of faulty use of oral contraceptives suggests not only that more attention should be paid to the details of this family planning method (how to incorporate the pill in a daily routine, for example, or how quickly a woman who quits taking the pill will become fertile again), but also that young women should be encouraged to consider longer-term contraceptives such as Norplant and Depo-Provera, as well as use of the "morning-after" pill. The study also suggests that contraceptive counseling efforts should be stepped up during periods of crisis and transition, when young women appear to be especially vulnerable to a repeat pregnancy. The difficulties experienced by these young women in avoiding repeat pregnancies also speak clearly to the need for effective initiatives to prevent a first birth.

- **The importance of testing the benefits of providing counseling and continued assistance as young people make critical transitions.**

The research strongly suggests that the importance of adult support figures does not diminish once young people have been successful in taking their first steps in a new and desired direction. Indeed, the frequently changing nature of participants' situations implies that early judgments about success or failure are likely to be just that—early and often premature.

The young women who made more progress toward self-sufficiency appeared more likely to remain in contact with their New Chance case manager or to establish a relationship with another helping adult (such as the JOBS program liaison at one community college). (As noted earlier, although the New Chance guidelines stipulated that case managers remain in contact with participants after they moved on to training or jobs, rising caseloads and the demands placed on a case manager's time and energies by new program entrants often made it difficult for her to conduct regular and detailed follow-up efforts.) Other program participants might well benefit from regular counseling by a case manager or another helping professional as they move into new and unfamiliar terrains. Such an adult could assist them in working out issues with supervisors and other colleagues at the workplace, or in finding a new job if necessary (or if a new position would offer more opportunities for advancement). The adult could help resolve child care, health, transportation, housing, and family problems or develop linkages and referrals to agencies that could provide such assistance, as well as check on a young person's understanding and consistent use of and satisfaction with family planning.

Who should provide such assistance, what it should encompass, how often contact should take place, and for how long are all open questions.[5] Within certain parameters, the specific answers are likely to vary with the individual client, depending on her current activity, her level of maturity, the areas in which she needs immediate assistance, her ongoing problems, the helping network she already has, and other factors. These decisions are also, of course, a function of budgets: case management and counseling are expensive services and tend to be reduced when agencies face fiscal constraints. The results of this study suggest, however, the importance of determining whether ongoing guidance and support will help young women who experience short-term success sustain that success over time.

- **The importance of testing alternative approaches to help more disadvantaged, less successful participants.**

New Chance rests on the premise that "highly disadvantaged people need comprehensive programs" and should therefore receive a wide range of concurrent services. The validity of this premise will be rigorously tested in the New Chance impact analysis—in particular, in the analysis of program impacts on different subgroups of enrollees.

Yet it is clear that a substantial number of young women—the majority of all program enrollees, according to Management Information System records—were not successful in getting a GED through New Chance. While some may still do so, it also may be worthwhile to test other interventions for especially disadvantaged young women.

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[5] One model of long-term follow-up is provided by Project Match, a demonstration program in Chicago that has been in operation since 1985. Located in an inner-city neighborhood, Project Match provides participants—of whom all are volunteers and most receive public assistance—with aid in finding and keeping jobs and in enrolling in and completing education and training programs. Program caseworkers continue to work with enrollees for as long as it takes them to achieve self-sufficiency. (See Herr, Halpern, and Conrad, 1991.)

Although this work leaves open the question of what these interventions would look like—and, obviously, whether they would prove effective—the case profiles of women in the pre-GED group illustrate the many personal and situational barriers that keep them from self-sufficiency. The number and severity of these obstacles suggest that for those young women who are exceptionally disadvantaged, the issue is not merely what they need but what they can incorporate and use at any given time. Rather than trying to do everything at once, it may be worthwhile to test an approach that requires a young woman to do something and to begin with what she defines as her most pressing issue, be it the acquisition of a specific skill or the resolution of a current problem. Additional services addressing other needs can then be added.[6] Starting with participants' perceived needs makes sense for two reasons: For one, it provides staff with a way to match services with the people who want and need those services. And, no less important, it is developmentally appropriate, giving young people a real say over what they will do and thereby increasing their confidence in their ability to control and shape their futures.

Implications for Policy

Programs for young mothers can and should be strengthened, and this monograph has suggested several ways in which this can occur. Nonetheless, the work raises concerns about the extent to which programs focused solely on changing the attitudes and behavior of young mothers as individuals can be successful for large numbers of participants unless they are constituent elements in a network of policies, institutions, and programs that support self-sufficiency.

- **The importance of ecologically grounded social policy.**

The young women in this study are, like other young mothers, enmeshed in social networks that include not only their children but also their parents and stepparents, other relatives, partners, and peers. This study strongly suggests that if even a relatively intensive program like New Chance is to redirect and rehabilitate the lives of its participants—whether as workers or as parents—it needs both the support of figures who are emotionally significant to the participants and programs and policies that address the needs of these individuals.

The lives of the young women interviewed demonstrate the importance of addressing the needs of a young woman's mother. An older female family member is often the only source of succor and support for a young single mother and her children. Yet, when faced with the necessity of rescuing a daughter, many of these older women are still struggling with their own difficulties or just beginning to get their own lives on track. Thus, they may benefit from employment assistance, counseling on interpersonal issues, and other services that will support their own efforts to move forward as well as those of their daughters. (Policymakers will need to grapple with the issue of whether a welfare mother who is caring for her daughter's children while the daughter attends school or a training program will herself be required to participate in JOBS.)

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[6] A "hub-and-spoke" referral system relying on skilled counselors and a network of programs with different emphases—"regular" GED programs, parent-child literacy development programs, employability development and job training programs, work experience programs, and so on—might be one vehicle for putting a more individualized approach into effect. Alternatively, one agency might deliver a variety of services under a single roof.

As a matter of social policy, welfare-to-work programs have often made employment and training opportunities available to welfare mothers but not to the fathers of their children. This division of resources means that a young woman who wants to get ahead may be forced to make an unpalatable choice: to go it alone, without male companionship; or to stand by a jealous man who tries to hold her back. If a young woman's partner is to encourage and assist her progress rather than to hinder it, he also needs opportunities for employment, education, and job training. Such assistance may benefit their children as well, if it enables a young man to increase his earnings, to provide regular financial support, and to enter into a stable relationship.[7]

- **The importance of high-quality, low-cost child care and back-up child care.**

As the study makes clear, child care is a critical service for young mothers seeking to improve their work-related skills and to gain and hold employment. Some respondents could depend on their mothers to provide this essential type of support and assistance, but many could not.

Child care needs to be reasonably priced or subsidized. Whether delivered at a child care center or a family daycare home, it also needs to be of high quality, for two reasons. First, many young mothers are reluctant to entrust their children to the care of strangers. For a mother who regards having a child as the only worthwhile thing she has ever accomplished, leaving that child with someone she does not know or trust requires a major leap of faith. It will be easier to make that leap if mothers can see that caregivers are affectionate and attentive to their children and that there are ample opportunities for learning.

Second, high-quality child care can allow young children to gain familiarity with structure and routine as well as to acquire the other preschool-readiness skills necessary for success in the early elementary grades. In this way, high-quality care can compensate for the inability of some young mothers to provide their children with a home setting that makes for adequate, let alone optimal, cognitive, linguistic, and socioemotional development (see Chapter 7).

- **The importance of a broad range of other institutions and policies that promote self-sufficiency.**

Several young women in the study encountered barriers to self-sufficiency created by the regulations of the institutions and systems with which they interacted, as well as by their failure to understand these regulations. For instance, one woman wanted to enroll in a skills training program, but the local JTPA agency, which funded the program, initially refused to pay her child care expenses because she had previously dropped out of college; only the intercession of a New Chance staff member led the agency's staff to reverse this decision.

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[7] The Parents' Fair Share Demonstration coordinated by MDRC aims to increase the earning capacity and child support payments of noncustodial parents of children receiving AFDC by combining employment and training services (especially subsidized on-the-job training) with enhanced child support enforcement procedures.

The absence of widely available, low-cost training and health care resources retards progress toward self-sufficiency. As noted in Chapter 1, JOBS provisions allow AFDC recipients who leave welfare because of an increase in earnings to retain eligibility for Medicaid, but only for one year. A number of respondents noted that they could not afford to give up welfare and Medicaid for a job that did not supply health insurance, especially to cover their children's medical needs.

This study suggests that if young mothers do not complete vocational training, they are likely to find jobs paying only the minimum wage or slightly higher. Under such circumstances, wage supplements, such as the Earned Income Tax Credit, play a potentially critical role in ensuring a decent standard of living.

- **The need for welfare policy that is sensitive to contingency and to complexity.**

A central issue in current welfare reform discussions is whether a time limit should be imposed on welfare receipt. Among the time-limited welfare proposals now being discussed by various states, some would require recipients whose time on the rolls has run out to work for a specified number of hours in either "workfare" or community service jobs in order to continue receiving financial assistance. Others would end cash welfare after the time limit expires (generally in 24 to 36 months) without offering further employment options.

While not addressing the matter directly, this monograph suggests some of the realities facing policymakers and program personnel seeking to implement such policies. First, it takes time for young mothers to remedy their basic educational deficits—more than seven months for the "average" GED recipient in this study to earn her high school equivalency certificate, and twice that length of time for less academically able young women—let alone to acquire the vocational training needed to get and keep a better-paying job. Then there is the fact that many of the jobs—even "good" jobs—that participants held lasted only a short time. Finally, it is an open question whether time limits would increase a young woman's task orientation and perseverance in the face of academic challenges and setbacks or of an unsympathetic supervisor.

Thus, in putting time limits in place, policymakers must make decisions about a number of issues: the appropriate criteria for exemptions and deferrals (how, for example, to treat someone who is making progress in education or training, but at a slower rate than meets the regulations); whether the "clock" will continue to run if a woman leaves welfare for work but then loses her job; how, if a work requirement is imposed, child care will be provided and paid for; whether a "second chance" will be accorded to a young mother whose first experience at a mandatory work setting is unsuccessful; and how to ensure that the increased stress on young mothers resulting from a mandatory work requirement—or a welfare cutoff—will be least detrimental to their already highly disadvantaged children.

We can only speculate about how the young women in this study would have responded to time limits and a welfare cutoff. Edna would, given her determination (see Chapter 2), probably be able to find and hold a job; but on the other hand, given her family's lack of economic resources to pay for community college tuition, she would be unlikely to be able to complete the two-year business course that she hopes will launch her on a career path. For Alexis, now adrift (Chapter 2), a time limit might be the impetus she needs to make something more of herself, and feel better about herself in the process, if she can get beyond the personal concerns that now weigh her down. Elda, socially isolated and psychologically troubled (Chapter 7), has moved with little sense of purpose from one activity to the next and might continue to do so; should she be cut off public assistance, she would probably receive some help from her mother and brothers. Letrice, for whom life has been a constant struggle (Chapter 5), would not be similarly able to fall back on her family: her alcoholic mother lives in an unheated house where there is little to eat; and her brother is now back in jail, having violated parole by assaulting Letrice and breaking two of her fingers. Without a "safety net" of government-provided assistance beneath her, Letrice might have both to return to the homeless shelter where she previously stayed and to place her beloved daughter in foster care.

The challenge to policymakers and program planners is, then, to embed programs like New Chance in a wider environment of policies and services that will better enable participants to achieve self-sufficiency and a better life for themselves and their children. And these policies and services should be grounded in a detailed understanding of the diverse needs, situations, and strengths of the population to be served. Contributing to such an understanding has been the goal of this study.

Appendix

TABLE A.1

SELECTED CHARACTERISTICS OF STUDY RESPONDENTS AND ALL PROGRAM ENROLLEES AT INTAKE INTO THE RESEARCH SAMPLE

Characteristic	Study Respondents	All Program Enrollees
Average age (years)	19.1	18.8
Ethnicity (%)		
White, non-Hispanic	18.0	23.0
Black, non-Hispanic	40.0	51.8
Hispanic	38.0	22.5
Other	4.0	2.6
Marital status (%)		
Never married	92.0	90.6
Married, spouse absent	8.0	2.8
Other	0.0	6.6
Number of children (%)		
1	60.0	65.4
2	24.0	26.4
3 or more	16.0	8.3
Average number of children	1.6	1.4
Age at first child's birth (%)		
15 or under	14.0	17.7
16-17	56.0	49.3
18-19	30.0	33.0
Lives with mother (%)	38.0	34.4
Lives with father (%)	12.0	7.9
Lives with spouse/partner (%)	10.0	11.2
Lived with both parents at age 14 (%)	32.0	22.6
Highest grade completed (%)		
9th or below	32.0	36.7
10th	30.0	30.3
11th or above	38.0	27.6
Average highest grade completed	10.0	9.8

(continued)

TABLE A.1 (continued)

Characteristic	Study Respondents	All Program Enrollees
Left school before first pregnancy (%)	44.0	38.3
Ever repeated a grade (%)	42.0	40.2
Average reading level (grade equivalent)	9.3	8.3
Mother has high school diploma or GED (%)	44.0	51.8
Average number of jobs ever held	2.8	2.6
Employed in past 12 months (%)	40.0	36.6
Mother employed (%)	52.0	49.7
Family on AFDC when enrollee was young (%)[a]		
Never	42.9	37.5
2 years or less	12.2	18.6
More than 2 years	28.6	26.6
Always	16.3	17.3
Expects to have more children (%)		
Yes	38.0	35.9
No	46.0	47.8
Uncertain	16.0	16.3
Used birth control at last intercourse (%)	70.0	70.2
In contact with father of child (%)[b]	60.0	66.4
Father/father's family babysits for child (%)[b]	48.0	44.8

(continued)

TABLE A.1 (continued)

Characteristic	Study Respondents	All Program Enrollees
Has child support order (%)[b]	36.0	27.9
Depression score (%)[c]		
Under 16	56.0	47.3
16-23	26.0	25.1
24 or over	18.0	27.6
Receives emotional support from mother (%)	60.0	59.5
Receives emotional support from child's father (%)[b]	28.0	28.8
Has home telephone (%)	94.0	84.4
Has driver's license (%)	24.0	27.7
Sample size	50	1 552

SOURCE: MDRC calculations from New Chance Management Information System data.

NOTES: The study respondent sample includes the 50 young women who participated in the study reported on in this monograph; they are compared with all 1,552 young women who enrolled in the New Chance experimental sample through July 1991.

Distributions may not total 100.0 percent because of rounding.

[a] The family's AFDC receipt may not have been continuous.

[b] When an enrollee had more than one child, her response refers to her first child.

[c] Scores on the depression scale used—the CES-D scale—can range from zero to 60. Scores of 16 and over are generally considered to indicate that the respondent is at risk for a clinical diagnosis of depression; scores of 24 and over are considered indicative of high risk for such a diagnosis.

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New Chance: Lessons from the Pilot Phase. 1989. Janet Quint, Cynthia Guy.

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The Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC) is a nonprofit social policy research organization founded in 1974 and located in New York City and San Francisco. Its mission is to design and rigorously field-test promising education and employment-related programs aimed at improving the well-being of disadvantaged adults and youth, and to provide policymakers and practitioners with reliable evidence on the effectiveness of social programs. Through this work, and its technical assistance to program administrators, MDRC seeks to enhance the quality of public policies and programs. MDRC actively disseminates the results of its research through its publications and through interchange with policymakers, administrators, practitioners, and the public.

Over the past two decades—working in partnership with more than forty states, the federal government, scores of communities, and numerous private philanthropies—MDRC has developed and studied more than three dozen promising social policy initiatives.

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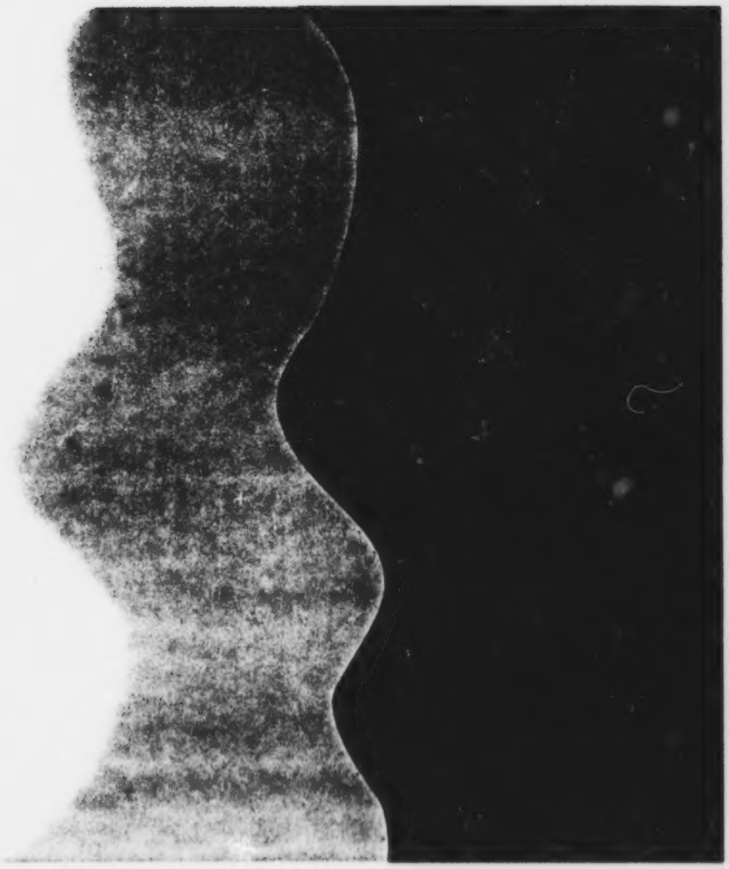

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